GMR

GET MORE FROM YOUR GAMES

PAGE 48//FEATURE//AWARDS

2003's RADICAL BEST

OUR ANNUAL PICKS OF THE TOP GAMES OF THE YEAR

GMR EXTRA:
NEW SCREENS AND INFO ON
BLOOD WILL TELL

PAGE 34//FEATURE//ASTRO BOY
HANDS-ON EXCLUSIVE

ASTRO BOY

SEGA'S NEW SONIC ROCKETS
HIGH ON PS2 AND GBA

SCOOPS:
HALO 2
NINTENDO DS

$4.99 US $6.99 CANADA   APRIL 2004

04 >

0 14024 06940 2

For Kit Yun, the
only way out of the
Hong Kong underworld
is to go back in.

AVAILABLE ON ANY SYSTEM

Tom Clancy's RAINBOW SIX 3

ONLINE
BROADBAND ONLY

PlayStation 2

Red Storm

UBISOFT

ONE GREAT NEW WAY
TO REWARD YOUR PLAY.

EB GAMES
electronics boutique

WE GIVE
CA$H
FOR
GAMES!

It only sounds too good to be true.

Ask a Store Associate for complete details.

FOR A STORE NEAR YOU CALL: 1-800-800-5166 · OR SHOP ONLINE AT EBGAMES.COM

EB GAMES
Electronics Boutique

We take games seriously ™

GMR

GET MORE FROM YOUR GAMES

CONTENTS
ISSUE **15**

FRONT
GMR NEWS NETWORK

NEXT
INCOMING GAMES

GMR

GET MORE FROM YOUR GAMES

BAD GAMES RULE!

It's easy to think that bad games are just plain bad for our videogaming world. Makes sense—how many millions of hours and dollars have been wasted on games that ultimately suck? Can you even imagine the tremendous effort that developers make to create and market a title—the impossibly long hours, the dozens of lost weekends—only to have their game garner a 2/10 in such venerable magazines as the one you are holding?

All to which I say: Keep up the good work! Bad games are good for gaming. How else would we know what good games are? There'd be no easy measure of quality. There'd be nothing to poke fun at. And then there'd be the problem of every game either being "good" or "great." Because the good games would be considered bad, when they're actually good. Hmm—do you see what I'm getting at?

No? Well, then maybe you should read our picks of the best games of 2003 (page 48). Here you'll find the veritable cream of the crop from last year—and not a bad game in sight. Promise.

P.S.: Please do us the honor of reading Milky's stellar feature on *Astro Boy* and find out what makes Tezuka's boy robot tick.

Dom Byron_Editor-in-Chief

STARRING

tom byron as editor-in-chief
dom byron as editor-in-chief?
james mielke as executive editor
carrie shepherd as managing editor
gerry serrano as art director
with caroline king as designer
and introducing andrew pfister as reviews editor

THE YOUNG AND THE RESTLESS
LAST MONTH, ON GMR....

Change is in the air: With erstwhile news editor and eccentric billionaire balloonist Tom Price still lost somewhere over the Pacific, the staff of GMR found itself shorthanded for the crucial April issue: the one that would determine whether GMR would continue on as a videogame publication or be purchased by the nefarious MagazineCORP and transformed into a biweekly sock catalog. Pfister, consumed by the stress of his new position and believing he was responsible for Tom Price's disappearance, got drunk and drove his Porsche off the Golden Gate Bridge. While visiting the comatose editor in the hospital, James finally professed his love for Caroline. Meanwhile, Carrie learned that she was pregnant with quintuplets and wondered if it could have been a side effect from her recent demonic possession. Gerry,

believing he was the father, took on a second job as a mariachi singer outside the local Taco Bell. Tom Byron won a decisive court battle against his identical twin and temporarily regained editorial control of the magazine. During the celebratory party, James sneaked away to feed his crippling FFXI habit, but Gerry saw him and confronted him. Meanwhile, down at the lake cottage, Carrie finally professed her love for Caroline. At the hospital, Dom attempted to suffocate Andrew with a pillow, but he miraculously awoke in time. Dom fled before security could arrive, but left behind a book: *High-Altitude Balloon Sabotage*, *Import Brain Tampering, Raising Quintuplets, and Being In Love With Caroline For Dummies*. But the name on the library check-out slip was not what Andrew expected....

MAFIA

JOIN THE FAMILY

COMING SOON TO PLAYSTATION®2 AND XBOX®

www.mafia-game.com   www.gathering.com

MATURE 17+

M

CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Blood
Violence

You've never done
anything
like this before.

MX UNLEASHED

A N O T H E R   C L A S S I C   F R O M   rainbow STUDIOS

POST

THERE'S A LETTER FROM A GIRL, AND IT'S NOT ABOUT BREASTS!

FALL FROM GRACE

I've been reading GMR since its first issue, which is the source of my question. In your first issue (February 2003), you made a list of what you thought would be the top 50 games of the year. This year (February 2004), you made a list of your picks for the best to come in 2004.

Unfortunately, a lot of the top games on your 2003 list were delayed until 2004 (such as Halo 2 which placed first; Doom 3, which got second; and Fable, which got sixth). What strikes me as odd is that all of these games have gone down significantly in your new batch of predictions. Halo 2 fell from first place to third, Doom 3 fell from second to fifth, and Fable fell from sixth place all the way to 26th. So my question is, what changed between then and now to make you desire these games less? Delays are never popular, but they're usually done to ensure that the game is as good as it can be when it is finally released.

P.S. Why did Kingdom Hearts 2 and Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories share a spot? From what I can gather, they're two entirely different games.
_terran8888

→ We're all psyched to play Fable, we just want Sofia Coppola more.

Unfortunately, the reality in videogame development is that delays often result in a lesser product, primarily because the technology a game starts with gets older and less impressive. There's also the simple fact that other games—which weren't there to compare against in 2003—have now risen to the forefront of anticipatory drool fodder.

And yeah, Kingdom Hearts 2 and Chain of Memories are two different games—but they are both sequels to the first Square-Disney collaboration. Plus, putting both at No. 7 was a sneaky way for us to squeeze in 51 games.

FALLOUT OF FALLOUT

Well, please allow me to start off like everyone else by saying, "I love your magazine!" Sorry, it's tradition, I guess. Your previews and reviews have saved me from a lot of bad gaming decisions, although there were some that couldn't be helped. I still don't know what you guys have against Enter the Matrix, though. I guess I'm just too much of a Matrix freak.

Anyway, could I request a big review of StarCraft: Ghost in the near future? I especially want to hear about any multiplayer info. I'm just itching to call a nuke on my brother and best friend in the same shot.

Also, I found something confusing. In Issue #14, you did a review of Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel. In it, you said, "Wait For It: Fallout 3." However, Issue #13 mentioned that Black Isle Studios closed. What exactly is happening with Black Isle right now? I loved PlaneScape: Torment, as well as Fallout 1 and 2, and my best friend (the one I plan to nuke) is freaking out about this, as well as the fact that his copy of Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel is very, very late.
_Loyal Reader (Now with 75 percent more free will!!)

As for StarCraft Ghost—you can request a review all you want, but we can't do one until we get the game! We'll do a preview, though, as soon as we get some new details.

Black Isle's parent company, Interplay, has long been under financial duress and decided to shutter the division in late December. Whether any company will pick up and continue with Black Isle's now-shelved Fallout series remains to be seen. Brotherhood of Steel, however, should safely be on store shelves.

MESSAGE BOARD JUNKIES

Want to help save the world? Then go to school. Want to waste countless hours talking about videogames? Then go to www.gmrmagazine.com and click on the word "Boards." This month, we asked the natives what they thought of Nintendo's latest foray into weirdness, also known as the dual-screened Nintendo DS...

Well, it probably plays a killer game of Battleship with those dual screens. And it better have AT LEAST six face buttons, just in case they port fighting games to this thing.
_Alt_Ctrl_Delete

What really makes me curious is what this means for GBA. Will Nintendo really be able to support two different portable systems, especially after the PSP comes out, which will only help make GBA SP look archaic in comparison? Considering that most of Nintendo's business is derived from its GBA sales, possibly fracturing its customer base with two different portable systems doesn't sound like the smartest idea ever.
_Krispy

WRITE US: GMR@ZIFFDAVIS.COM

HYPOCRITES

I'm really sick and tired of hearing people complain about violence in videogames. I will admit, it has gotten a little bit excessive, but it's not as out of control as the movies and TV programs we see today. By comparison, videogames are actually quite tame. My theory is that since the majority of adults do not play videogames, they feel they can criticize games all they want because it won't affect them. If we were to ban certain movies or make everything on television into a PG program, we would certainly hear them complaining, too, but isn't violence violence no matter which media outlet it comes from? Everyone who complains, in short, is a hypocrite.
_Gen Rossman

And should be shot!

SCOOP?

I thought you only reviewed finished games. So imagine my surprise when I saw the Ninja Gaiden review in Issue #12. If Ninja Gaiden really was finished in November when you wrote your review, why was it delayed until late February? You have to admit it looks bad. One might draw the conclusion that you guys reviewed an incomplete game in order to get the scoop on your competitors. But then Tecmo screwed you over when it delayed the game.
_Charles Davey

When we reviewed Ninja Gaiden, we believed the code we had was the finished product, but after our review went to press, we learned that Tecmo decided to tweak the game. We will publish a new review in our next issue…assuming we get the finished game. Heh.

→ Unbelievable though it may seem, some suckers will pay actual money for this on eBay.

SMART SHOPPER

The other day, I was at a local record store and when I went to pay for the CDs I was buying, I saw that they had an old Panasonic 3DO system sitting on the counter. When I inquired about it, they said someone had brought it in about a half hour before that. Their original price for the package was $40, but I talked them down to $24! And it wasn't just the system, it was the system with two controllers and the following games: 20th Century Video Almanac, Battle Chess, The Daedalus Encounter (which features Tia Carrere), D&D: Deathkeep, Demolition Man, Doom, Dragon's Lair, Guardian War, Take 2's Hell: A Cyberpunk Thriller, Mad Dog II, John Madden Football (which looks just like my GBA version), Need for Speed, Night Trap, Plumbers Don't Wear Ties, Shanghai: Triple Threat, Twisted: The Game Show, and Way of the Warrior (which looks like Mortal Kombat with real people as fighters—think the Adema "Immortal" music video in Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance).

Better yet, I found out that I could sell all of this stuff on eBay for upward of $100! Talk about right place, right time, huh? And finally, please publish this so I can share my accomplishments with the world (or at least your reader

base). Later.
_Brandon Ratliff

LIVE LABEL

Can you guys add a little note like (L) or (XBL) to identify an Xbox Live–capable game? That little tidbit of info would be a great help to us otherwise loner gamers in our search for good games to wait for.
_Dan M, NY

Good idea. We'll be tweaking our design in the near future, so let us know what other changes you'd like to see. No promises, but we still want to hear your ideas.

WHINER

In response to Ryan, who can't get his girlfriend to play Halo with him (Post, Issue #14): Dude, what the hell is wrong with you? You got your girlfriend to play Soul Calibur II and Animal Crossing with you, isn't that enough? I still can't play Soul Calibur around my girlfriend because every time I have to fight Ivy or Talim, she thinks I'm looking at their bodies. Stop complaining.
_Demetrius

Good point, Demetrius. And another thing, Ryan: You HAVE a girlfriend. So shut up.

GIRL CALL

I was checking out your two most recent issues and noticed that there doesn't seem to be a whole lot of female response to this magazine. Maybe it's just not being shown?

I'm not a crazy feminist gamer who demands to be noticed by a male-dominated industry. I'm just curious as to what you guys think about your female market.

And just a heads up: No, I don't play cutesy Barbie and happy sunshine games. Give me an RPG or an action game over anything.
_Shae "Slack" Sackman

→ You can't fool us. This is what girls like.

If it still doesn't have a headphone jack, all hell will break loose….
_atomic_gerbil

I think Virtual Boy grew up to be a Virtual Man, mated with an N-Gage, and had a retarded child.
_LuigiSunshine

This thing's success all depends on Nintendo's ability to prove that there are practical applications for two screens (I see none). Show me some software that makes concentrating on two screens appealing, and I'll show you the contents of my wallet.
_DQ

Now, while nothing is written in stone, I just don't see how a second screen will really come into play. It almost seems like Nintendo's taking its GBA/GC connectivity deal, packaging it into ANOTHER handheld system, and selling it all over again.
_GopherCakes

POST

WRITE US: GMR@ZIFFDAVIS.COM

Our circulation department inform us that our readership is 95 percent male. You, Slack, are a rare gem.

SAVE SANITY

How does one get the message across to programmers regarding game saves? I am so tired of spending an hour or more on a particularly hard part of a game, only to have the phone ring, be called for a meal, or have to go to an appointment, causing all the good, hard work I have done to be lost because I am unable to save. How many times does one hear the argument "I can't do this or that chore because I will lose everything." Come on, put in random saves. Not everyone can play a game in one hour or less, and families are being ripped apart.
_Doreen Box

We've heard plenty of complaints about the lack of save points in games, but the "families being ripped apart" thing is something we hadn't considered. Write your congressperson! Maybe there should be a law!

BRAINSTORM

I just had this unbelievable brainstorm: an FPS where you are a psychic! Instead of a gun, the game just shows your outstretched hand, which, when you equip a powerful move, may glow or tremble. You use only psychic powers in your quest. You may want to use this power to throw enemies on their backs or up against walls, pull objects off of walls or floors fire extinguishers, paintings, tables], or even pull rugs out from under people's feet. Near the end of the game, maybe you would have to fight entire armies— you could hurl cars at them or stop their bullets Neo style and push them back. When you switch psychic powers, you have a power gauge for each one that runs down as you use it, but it recharges gradually. Moves like throwing objects recharge almost instantaneously, whereas moves like making people explode recharge very slowly.

Has a game this cool ever been conceived? This could be the coolest game ever. Can I get an "amen" from my friends at GMR?
_young-criminal

Has a game this cool ever been conceived? Sort of. Your idea reminds us of Psychonauts, which is in development at Tim Schafer's studio, Double Fine Productions. It's not a first-person shooter, but your character must use paranormal powers, such as telekinesis, levitation, and pyrokinesis. The game has been delayed until late this year, though, so you still have time to beat it to the market.

GEEZER SIGHTING

I'm typing this because I saw the Game Geezer. I know this sounds ridiculous, but I am sure it was him. I was sitting in a roadside cafe in Redcliffe, Australia, and there was a hobo begging for money and playing his guitar. At first, I didn't look twice. Later on, I went over and gave him a $5 bill (I was feeling generous—I'm a real sucker for that stuff). He swiped the money out of my hand and said, "Whach this? Oh, thanks kid, there just ain't no love for little geezer no more, nope, there just ain't no love." When I got a look at his face, I was amazed to see that he looked—no, he was identical to—the Game Geezer. Maybe the Geezer's got himself a long-lost bro? Or an identical twin?
_Xx_BrAsS_MoNkEy_xX

Or maybe it was him!

WARM WELCOME

What the sh*t were you guys thinking when you said that Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace was number four of the five worst Star Wars games ever? That game is not as bad as Star Wars for Game Boy. Switch 'em, damn it! I am, however, ecstatic about your new editor-in-chief, Tom Byron. The more Star Wars fans, the better. May the Force be with you, Tom.....
_A totally pissed-off fan
[aka Imperial Lance Corporal Eafai Mecy]

AD INDEX

David and Amy
Saturday night 10:15
Beach Bonfire

CLEAR SKIN MATTERS

Keep your mind on the important things. Not on your body acne.

Nature's Cure® Two-Part Body Acne Treatment System works INSIDE and OUTSIDE to clear and prevent acne.

- Medicated formula sprays from any angle to clear blemishes in hard-to-reach places.

- All-natural tablets help stop body acne where it starts.

SPRAY ONLY OR 2-PART SYSTEM
Available at select stores

Nature's Cure. Be ready for when it matters most.

©2004 Nature's Cure.

Dermatologist Tested. Safe and Effective.
www.4NCinfo.com

FOR THOSE
WHO LIVE
TO LEARN NEW GAMES. . . . .

EB GAMES
electronics boutique

www.ebgames.com

FRONT

X GMR NEWS NETWORK

↘ IN THE NEWS

DVD
PSI
GBA
PC
GAMECUBE
XBOX
PS2

→ Illustration by Hoops

→ We have no idea what the DS will look like, and Nintendo isn't ready to reveal anything. That's why we thought we'd have a little fun, and commissioned this artist's design concept. The GMR DS features a sleek, modern, yet simple form, in line with recent Nintendo systems. Aside from the obvious dual screens, note the side panels that house the shoulder buttons and—gasp!—a headphone jack. We built our version with wireless connectivity in mind, opting for the radio-frequency (RF) approach. With stereo speakers, 3D screens, and a concave, ultracomfortable D-pad, we think Nintendo has a winner. Or GMR does.

PSP KILLER?
NINTENDO BETS BIG ON ITS MYSTERIOUS NEW DUAL-SCREEN HANDHELD
JAPAN

Nintendo is full of surprises these days. Since last fall, the company has been touting a major new product for 2004. Nintendo calls it "Ishitsu na shinshouhin," which means "heterogeneous new product" in English, although it makes little sense in either language. Now it has a code name: Nintendo DS. But Nintendo has plenty of secrets left to reveal.

DS stands for "dual screen." Nintendo's first surprise is that its next handheld will have two displays, a pair of identical 3-inch TFT LCD screens. Each screen will be powered by its own processor, with an ARM9 central processor for the main screen (the same CPU as Tapwave's Zodiac handheld) and an ARM7 subprocessor for the secondary screen (the same CPU as the existing Game Boy Advance). The two screens can independently display different images—a sports game might show a wide view of the field and a close-up of a player, while a Metal Gear game might use that extra screen for the Codec display.

And...is that it?

Not quite. After the initial announcement, Nintendo dropped a few more hints: Like the GBA SP, the DS has a rechargeable battery, the screens are backlit for optimum low-light viewing, and Shigeru Miyamoto is leading the first-party game-development effort.

Nintendo maintains that the dual-screen gimmick is still just part of the story. The DS has other capabilities—which won't be revealed until this May's E3, the annual game industry trade show in Los Angeles. Speculation on those features has run rampant from newfangled 3D LCD-screen technology to wireless communications capability to a digital-camera input device similar to Sony's Eye Toy. According to Japan's Famitsu Weekly, the DS will deliver games via memory cards rather than the larger ROM cartridges traditionally used for handhelds. The question of backward compatibility with GBA games is still being discussed.

Meanwhile, Nintendo is careful to stress that this isn't the next Game Boy. After the DS ships worldwide at the end of 2004—around the same time as Sony's PSP—Nintendo still plans to release direct successors to both GameCube and Game Boy Advance. Start saving your money now. ▐➡

GBA

GC

NINTENDO SPEAKS ON THE DS

With all the speculation surrounding the DS, we thought we'd just ask Nintendo directly. Perrin Kaplan, vice president of marketing and corporate communications for Nintendo of America, kindly answered our questions...but keeps us speculating.

GMR: Is the DS a move to counter Sony's handheld plans, or is it part of a bigger strategy?

PK: Nintendo always has something new in the portable arena in development. [The DS] was a unique idea that came to the fore and Nintendo decided to pursue it. It's a different product than our current SP product. They complement each other well. No, this is not a counter to Sony's product. The DS is part of a bigger strategy of continuing to maintain the 96 percent market share we currently enjoy.

GMR: But the DS is a portable system that plays videogames. With plans to continue the regular Game Boy line, how will Nintendo avoid consumers' confusion?

PK: When you see the product at E3, it will become clear. We will be able to support both products with separate campaigns. Portable play continues to be very hot, and consumers have an insatiable appetite for trying out new ways to enjoy games on the go.

GMR: Do the projected DS user base and the existing Game Boy user base overlap, or do you expect different audiences?

PK: Some same and some different. Many early adopters will want to own both.

GMR: Considering what happened with the Virtual Boy, are you at all concerned about a nontraditional gaming machine not gaining acceptance or developer support?

PK: Virtual Boy was in a category of its own since it was such a unique proposition. Portable play has been well established by Nintendo, and players want to experience more and more. This will help feed that appetite.

GMR: What has Japanese and Western third-party reaction been like?

PK: We are talking to third parties now, so you'll hear more soon! We think they'll find it appealing. ◄■

THERE'S STILL TIME NINTENDO

If [the DS] had a video camera on the back with an output to one of the screens, then it would be like you were looking through the device. You could walk around playing a game on one screen while watching where you're going on the other screen. Genius.

Tim Schafer, Double Fine, creator of Grim Fandango, Day of the Tentacle, _and_ Psychonauts

[BLIPS]

DS publishers so far...

Third-party game publishers are being as tight-lipped about their DS plans as Nintendo is about the system. Namco is the only major player to formally pledge support, while Electronic Arts and Sega are seriously evaluating DS development. Sega also confirmed that it has received "development tools" for producing DS games.

GAMEPORT VITAL GAME INFO. NOW BOARDING...

✈ Arrivals COMING SOON

SYSTEM	ETA	TITLE	HOW HOT?
XB	MAR	**BREAKDOWN** Namco should use the engine for a Roadhouse game.	🔥🔥🔥🔥
PS2	MAR	**RESIDENT EVIL: OUTBREAK** Many late nights of the living dead.	🔥🔥🔥🔥
XB	MAR	**SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW** The PS2 and GC versions got pushed back.	🔥🔥🔥🔥
PS2	APR	**SYPHON FILTER: THE OMEGA STRAIN** ...but here's something to keep PS2 players occupied.	🔥🔥🔥
PS2	APR	**GRADIUS V** Keep your options open	🔥🔥🔥
GC	APR	**WARIOWARE, INC.: MEGA PARTY GAMES** Now everyone can make the big cry!	🔥🔥🔥
PS2/XB	APR	**NBA BALLERS** Bringing the blingest of the bling.	🔥🔥🔥
PS2/XB	APR	**REO OEAO REVOLVER** Once canceled, now back from the dead.	🔥🔥
PC/PS2/XB	APR	**ALIAS** Sadly, does not come with electric blue wig.	🔥🔥
PC/PS2/XB	APR	**HITMAN: CONTRACTS** Fifty dollars is all it takes to off someone nowadays.	🔥🔥🔥
PS2	APR	**SERIOUS SAM** Surely, we can't be...	🔥🔥
PC	APR	**PAINKILLER** Sponsored by Advil.	🔥🔥🔥
GBA	APR	**RIVER CITY RANSOM** Makes us feel old	🔥🔥🔥
PC	APR	**CITY OF HEROES** We're hoping that the Tick makes an appearance.	🔥🔥🔥
GC	MAY	**PIKMIN 2** Finally blooming after a long delay	🔥🔥🔥🔥
GBA/GC	MAY	**MEGA MAN ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION** Makes us feel really old.	🔥🔥🔥

✦ DEPARTURES OUT NOW

SYSTEM	TITLE	GMR SCORE
GC	**FINAL FANTASY: CRYSTAL CHRONICLES** It's not a traditional Final Fantasy ..but it's not supposed to be	8[no]
PC	**SILENT STORM** Heck, we like it just because it's not an FPS.	9[no]
PS2	**TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON: JUNGLE STORM** Not that there's anything wrong with the FPS, mind you.	7[no]
PS2/XB	**BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE II** Instead of this one...	6[no]
PS2	**FALLOUT: BROTHERHOOD OF STEEL** ...or this one...	6[no]
PS2	**CHAMPIONS OF NORRATH: REALMS OF EVERQUEST** ...you should buy this one.	8[no]
PS2	**RISE TO HONOR** Ripe for a movie adaptation, at least.	6[no]
XB	**SILENT SCOPE COMPLETE** The sniper series hasn't aged very well.	6[no]
GC/PS2/XB	**FREESTYLE STREET SOCCER** It's like MLS Street—perhaps EA should take a crack at it	4[no]
PS2	**WINNING ELEVEN 7** The far more realistic version is far better.	9[no]
GC/PS2/XB	**NFL STREET** Speaking of Street ...	8[no]
PS2	**R-TYPE FINAL** A glorious send-off to a treasured franchise.	9[no]
GBA	**METROID: ZERO MISSION** Brings back fond memories of a classic game.	9[no]
PC	**COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO** Does not bring back fond memories of a classic game.	5[no]
GBA	**THE SIMS: BUSTIN' OUT** Because your real job sucks.	8[no]
GBA	**YU YU HAKUSHO: SPIRIT DETECTIVE** Like you would have bought it anyway.	2[no]

(sidebar:) XB PC PS2 GBA GC

INFOMANIA!
THE LATEST ON...

Dear Friends
music from
FINAL FANTASY

SQUARE SONGS SAY SO MUCH

On May 10, Square Enix will host the first *Final Fantasy* concert ever held in the United States at the newly inaugurated Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles. Dear Friends—Music From *Final Fantasy* will feature the music of the *Final Fantasy* series as performed by the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Los Angeles Master Chorale.

"*Final Fantasy*'s award-winning scores have captivated gamers worldwide, and now we have an opportunity to share some of the series' most memorable melodies with our fans and concertgoers for the first time in the U.S.," says Jun Iwasaki, president and CEO of Square Enix USA.

Series composer Nobuo Uematsu will create the score for the two-hour concert. ◄■

CLICKS
GO HERE NOW PLGRRR

WWW.BAM4FUN.COM

Your word of the day is "Gackt." The Japanese rock idol who bears that unusual name—and who also claims to be five centuries old—will make his American videogame debut in *Bujingai*. Bam! Entertainment is publishing Red's (*Gungrave*) PS2 slash-em-up in the United States this May. ◄■

[SCREEN]
ANIME REPORT
CAPTAIN HERLOCK: SPACE PIRATE

AVAILABLE NOW/// PRICE: $29.98// RUNNING TIME: 100 MINUTES// RATING: 13 AND UP//

➡ Aimed at a young and insecure audience, Japanese animation typically features heroes its audience can identify with. To varying degrees, certainly—not all shows descend to the fantasy-fulfilling depths of *Oh! My Goddess* or *Love Hina*—but as a rule, you can see something of the viewer in the protagonist. The idea is to create a sense of identification with the character, letting the viewer see the hero's troubles and challenges as his own.

And then there is Captain Herlock, the ultimate expression of human potential. In him, we're not meant to see what we are, but perhaps what we could one day be.

Leiji Matsumoto inspires that sort of thought. He has never thought small, not even once, in his career. His stuff is epic—*Yamato*, *Galaxy Express*, *Arcadia of My Youth*—and he makes no apologies for its grand scope. This is the man who nearly got away with doing animated Wagner, after all.

Captain Herlock, the latest appearance of the legendary space pirate, doesn't aim quite as high as the overambitious *Herlock Saga*. Rather than a tale of gods and heroes, it's just a bloody well-done Matsumoto story. After the success of *Metropolis*, Rin Taro directs this series, with screen writing from Sadayuki Murai (*Millennium Actress*) and fine production from Studio Madhouse. This is Rin Taro's return to the material after two decades—he worked with Matsumoto on the original *Herlock* TV series—and he hasn't lost the touch.

Herlock wisely introduces a touch of audience identification in the form of a brash young recruit on board the *Arcadia*. But this is still Herlock's show, and his legend is what gives it life.

SPECIAL FEATURES: 5.1-channel surround sound livens up the English and Japanese voice tracks, and obsessive types can try to collect four different bonus pencil boards. ◄■

HALO 2 WATCH

➡ Bungie finally revealed a look at multiplayer action in *Halo 2*. You can play as the Master Chief, but playing as a Covenant Elite, or other classes, remains a mystery. Publisher Microsoft confirmed *Halo 2* is a fall 2004 release.

bungie.net

PLAYSTATION KNOWLEDGE
THEY KNOW STUFF SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO!

JOHN DAVISON

PSP ROUNDUP

➡ With PSP set for release in early December, it's safe to assume that things are cranking on the development front. While Sony continues to be tight-lipped on just about every detail of the machine, some digging has revealed a number of projects on the go.

Electronic Arts is said to be quite enamored of PSP, and I've heard that the system's launch will see a *Madden* game and an *SSX* game at the very least. Sony itself is obviously readying a whole slew of games, and hopefully we'll be spared of the PS2-launch junk and see some top-shelf franchises right out of the gate. There have been lots of reports of a portable *Hot Shots Golf* in the works, but I've also heard rumors of *Twisted Metal* and *Gran Turismo*.

Namco is said to have a new *Ridge Racer* up and running, with a *Tekken* game also possibly on track for December, too. Sega is working on something, which could be *Astro Boy*, or less likely, *Sonic*. Koei is said to have a *Dynasty Warriors* game, and Konami is apparently tinkering with some kind of *Metal Gear* derivative. As previously reported, Square Enix has yet to commit to the system, but there are rumblings of a *Final Fantasy* game with a *Crystal Chronicles*–type subtitle. ◄■

—John Davison is editor-in-chief of the *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine*.

ONIMUSHA
BLADE WARRIORS

EVERY FIGHT IS A WAR...
EVERY WARRIOR IS A LEGEND.

Command the noble universe of **Onimusha** in this hardcore **3-D action** fighting game. **Select** your **Warrior** from **24 characters** from the world of **Onimusha** and prepare to **battle**. **Fight** **solo** or with up to **three others** for lightning fast **multi-player battles** that show off your **skills** as the **ultimate Warrior**.

CLONE WARS

I hate PC gaming. No, I don't. Not really. But every time I play a great console game brimming with creativity, I get frustrated at how it seems to be getting harder to find the same level of creativity in the PC arena.

Case in point: *Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando*. Here's a PS2 game that offers something new and fun around every corner. There have been 8 billion platform games by my count since the late '80s, yet *Ratchet & Clank's* developers still found ways to make the genre seem fresh, relevant, and exciting.

Compare this now to, say, the RTS genre on PC. Basically, every game that comes out is either a *WarCraft III* or an *Age of Empires* clone. And it's been this way for years. Blizzard and Ensemble innovate, sell millions, and then everyone else copies them to death. Did we really need *Lords of EverQuest*? No, we didn't—we already had *WarCraft III*.

Not every game has to, or should, reinvent the wheel every single time. But, you know, a few new spokes on the wheel wouldn't kill you either. PC developers need to spend a little less time trying to duplicate the success of others and more time finding ways to get us excited again. Give me a reason to stick this PS2 in the closet. Please. 1◀

Jeff Green is editor-in-chief of Computer Gaming World magazine.

XB
PC
PS2
GBA
GC

CAPCOM-ING SOON
ONIMUSHA 3 HEADLINES NEW GAMES FOR 2004
U.S.A.

If there's one thing the folks at Capcom like to do, it's booze and gamble. That explains the annual trips to Vegas to showcase their upcoming goods for the year, although they usually reserve a couple things for E3 in May. So, what did they bring to the party this January? A bunch of stuff.

Among the titles we got to take a deeper look at were *Monster Hunter*, a *PSO*-style online multiplayer game that looks fantastic. The controls are a little unconventional, but we'll reserve judgement until we get a playable version for ourselves. Other titles include its upcoming Halloween trick treat, *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, and its soon-to-be-released star vehicle *Onimusha 3*. Keiji Inafune, the producer of the *Onimusha* series, also unveiled a

surprise in the form of *Shadows of Rome*, a gladiatorial action game filled with mystery and intrigue (along with some awesome chariot races and arena battles) that's being developed by the *Onimusha 2* team.

Other highlights were *Mega Man X: Command Mission*, a cel-shaded RPG;

Mega Man Battle Network 4: Red Sun (and *Blue Moon*), and two games that we'll reveal to you in one month's time. What are they? You'll have to guess, but one of them features a guy with a gun, and the other features a character with major issues. We could tell you more, but then we'd have to kill you. 1◀

_More info at www.capcom.com

SEGA SNAGS SAMURAI
BUT WHAT ELSE DOES IT HAVE COMING?
U.S.A.

Sega's release schedule is looking sparse these days. *Astro Boy's* summer arrival is great news, but the only other newly announced game on its list is *Samurai Jack*. The Xbox, PS2, and GameCube adaptation of the Cartoon Network hit—by *Azurik* developer Adrenium— arrives in March between *Nightshade* (February) and *Blood Will Tell* (later this spring).

Sega may have a lot left to show, though. Amusement Vision's Toshihiro Nagoshi claims to have three games perking, including *SpikeOut Extreme*, and recently raved about the great projects he's seen around Sega. We'll see him put his money where his mouth is at E3. 1◀

[BLIPS]

Marvel vs. EA

Electronic Arts and Marvel Enterprises have completed a deal that allows EA to develop fighting games in which Marvel characters are pitted against EA-created superheroes. The first of these original titles is currently in development at EA Canada. Madden vs. The Hulk?

Pandora the day after tomorrow

It looks like Microsoft will be getting a jump on the competition with *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow*. The PS2 and GC versions have been delayed, effectively giving Xbox another temporary exclusive with the series. Will this one last 90 days as well? Only time will tell.

FIRST LOOK
FORGOTTEN REALMS
U.S.A.
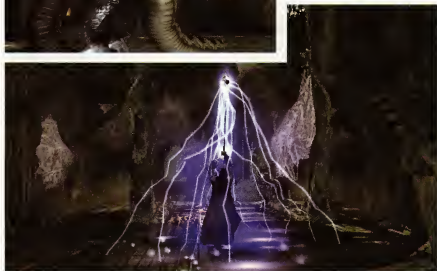
Atari is gearing up to unleash a +5 broadsword of whoop ass this September with a new *Forgotten Realms* game for PS2. Based on the *D&D* setting of the same name, the yet-to-be-titled *Forgotten Realms* is being developed by Stormfront Studios, which was responsible for 2002's stellar *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*.

The new *Forgotten Realms*, much like its predecessor, is a straightforward action-adventure experience. The events unfold across 11-plus expansive levels, encompassing plenty of familiar *Realms* territory, such as Mithril Hall and the Jungles of Chult. We've also been told to expect a few familiar faces, including everyone's favorite goody-two-shoes dark elf, Drizzt Do'Urden.

The game's story, crafted by fan-favorite *Forgotten Realms* novelist R. A. Salvatore and Emmy award-winning *Batman Beyond* scriptwriter Bob Goodman, deals with the release of several imprisoned demons who are bent on world domination. Three heroes band together to combat this menace: a powerful fighter, a fireball-flinging sorcerer, and a crafty rogue who specializes in sneak attacks. What ensues is sure to be a fast and furious hackfest, filled to the brim with trademark *D&D* baddies.

One of the biggest new gameplay features is the ability to switch characters on the fly. You can jump between the three heroes at your whim while the computer handles your inactive party members. Each of the three characters has specific strengths, weaknesses, and flashy combo maneuvers, so expect to jump back and forth a lot.

Forgotten Realms promises a rich game environment with plenty of plot twists, dazzling visuals, and a fully orchestrated musical score. Hardcore *D&D* fans will also recognize some familiar rule mechanics from the popular d20 role-playing system, though most of the number crunching is thankfully swept under the rug. So put your dice bag away, grab a controller, and get ready for some fast-paced *D&D* action this fall. ▪️
_Ryan Scott

_More info at www.atari.com

DS DO'S AND DON'TS

➜ Listen, Nintendo, no one wants to see your new DS get steamrolled by Sony's PSP (well, except for Sony, of course), so I've got a few do's and don'ts for ya. Yeah, I know, you've made billions with your virtual monopoly on handheld gaming for almost two decades, but I've made untallied hundreds of dollars over the past five years writing about this industry, so...yeah.

DO give it more buttons than GBA for proper console games and an analog control stick.

DON'T shut out the third-party game publishers. For once I'd like to see a handheld where 99 percent of the games worth owning aren't either Nintendo franchises or Castlevanias.

DON'T misunderstand me, I love Nintendo franchises and Castlevanias. But how about some really good sports titles for once? Or more adult-oriented games like GTA and Resident Evil?

DO make it capable of wireless networking for multiplayer games. Who carries around a link cable?

DON'T release a newer, improved version of the system (à la GBA SP) for at least two years after launch.

DO include a standard headphone jack. You hear that? Standard. Headphone. Jack. ▮◀

Mark MacDonald is executive editor at Electronic Gaming Monthly.

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

EB GAMES
electronics boutique®

GMR CHARTS
TOP-SELLING GAMES FOR EVERY SYSTEM FOR JANUARY '04

TOP 10 ALL FORMATS

RANK	TITLE	FORMAT	SCORE
01	**NFL STREET** Thank God there aren't any halftime shows.	PS2	8
02	**NFL STREET** Think all the kickers are pissed that they're not in the game?	XB	8
03	**SONIC HEROES** Care for a threesome? No, not like that....	GC	7
04	**NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND** Drift away.	PS2	9
05	**BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE II** Instead of Champions of Norrath? Really?	PS2	6
06	**BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE II** You have dropped 50 gold.	XB	6
07	**MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!!** Mario Kart Underground: We'd say buy it.	GC	10
08	**MAFIA** There's nothing funny about organized crime.	PS2	7
09	**HALO** Sleeper hit of 2004?	XB	9
10	**FINAL FANTASY X-2** Girls, girls, girls...Mötley Crüe would approve.	PS2	9

PS2 TOP 10 SCORE

01	NFL STREET	8
02	NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND	9
03	BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE II	6
04	MAFIA	7
05	FINAL FANTASY X-2	9
06	SOCOM II: U.S. NAVY SEALS	9
07	MADDEN NFL 2004	9
08	DBZ: BUDOKAI 2	7
09	PRINCE OF PERSIA	8
10	MANHUNT	6

XBOX TOP 10 SCORE

01	NFL STREET	8
02	BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE II	6
03	HALO	10
04	NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND	9
05	GTA DOUBLE PACK	10
06	SPLINTER CELL	9
07	PRINCE OF PERSIA	8
08	RAINBOW SIX 3	9
09	SEGA GT ONLINE	6
10	PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2	9

PC TOP 10 SCORE

01	DELTA FORCE: BLACK HAWK DOWN TEAM SABRE	TBD
02	CALL OF DUTY	7
03	FINAL FANTASY XI	TBD
04	THE SIMS: DELUXE EDITION	TBD
05	NEVERWINTER NIGHTS: HORDES OF THE UNDERDARK	TBD
06	STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC	10
07	THE SIMS: MAKIN' MAGIC	10
08	MORROWIND: GAME OF THE YEAR	10
09	BATTLEFIELD 1942	TBD
10	LOTR: RETURN OF THE KING	9

GBA TOP 10 SCORE

01	SMA4: SUPER MARIO BROS. 3	9
02	SONIC BATTLE	TBD
03	MARIO & LUIGI: SUPERSTAR SAGA	9
04	FIRE EMBLEM	8
05	FF TACTICS ADVANCE	9
06	THE SIMS: BUSTIN' OUT	8
07	DBZ: TAIKETSU	TBD
08	HARVEST MOON	7
09	YU-GI-OH! SACRED CARDS	TBD
10	SMW: SUPER MARIO ADVANCE 2	9

GC TOP 10 SCORE

01	SONIC HEROES	7
02	MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!!	10
03	NFL STREET	8
04	PRINCE OF PERSIA	8
05	NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND	9
06	SPLINTER CELL	9
07	MARIO PARTY 5	8
08	LORD OF THE RINGS: RETURN OF THE KING	9
09	STAR WARS ROGUE SQUADRON III	7
10	THE SIMS: BUSTIN' OUT	5

[TALENT]
✕ NOBUYA NAKAZATO
A HERO TO CONTRA FANS AND LONELY GAMERS

This month's Talent focuses on the efforts of one Nobuya Nakazato, producer of the legendary *Contra* series, as well as the mastermind behind such critically acclaimed hits as *Vandal Hearts* [PS1]. We chat with him about the 1980s, the upcoming PS2 game, *Neo Contra*, and lonely gamers.

GMR: After *Contra: Shattered Soldier*, what prompted the move to all-3D action?

NN: Well, after *Shattered Soldier*, we had discussions about giving the player a lot more freedom to make it a much more strategic game with the enemy and the player, and what came out was a new 3D game.

GMR: Will the spread shot still look similar to the old-fashioned *Contra* shot, with the red balls that fire out? Or will it just have the signature stylistic elements of the classic *Contra*?

NN: Yes, we do have signature effects like you mention, but we cannot have everything the way it used to be, like the tiny red balls. We made things very sophisticated to match the environments.

GMR: The game seems to have a great sense of humor. Is this deliberate? Watching your characters running on spinning helicopter blades like gerbils (while shooting) is comedy gold.

NN: We love that scene, too. Actually, it's true—we will keep the sense of humor. But as you know, *Contra* is a war game, and if you make it just like war, then it's really boring and it's really miserable, don't you think? *Contra* is something that you can get into and [have fun with].

GMR: When *Contra* began, it was done during the Reagan era. Very '80s, very *Rambo*. We're in a different era now, despite the Republican reign. Is *Contra* an anachronistic relic?

NN: Yes, we're trying to make *Contra* fit with what's currently happening right now. True, we started off during the gun-crazy '80s. It's something in the back of your mind, and in the '80s, *Rambo* was pretty popular, and with that, violence was like a way to justify things.

But then again, in the 21st century, what is justice? You cannot really identify, simply, what it is. There are so many factors that you have to deal with. So it's not that easy, like it was back in the '80s.

GMR: You were saying that you're going to make the story more prominent. How are you going to tell the story—through voice acting?

NN: Well, between the stages, there are demo scenes. We'll have cut-scenes with voiceovers. And, of course, during these scenes, when the playable characters meet some important characters and trigger key events, there will be real-time movies.

GMR: Have you ever thought about adding an A.I. partner to the single-player game? The basic human two-player team is more worth it, because it's fun playing together. If an A.I. character helps you out with something, do you think it would still be fun? If it's done well, it's fun. Sometimes it's hard to get people over to play, so in some ways, it's kind of fun because it feels like you have company.

NN: Well, within the confines of *Contra*, *Neo Contra* will require two players playing cooperatively. But in the future, we'd definitely like to think about it.

GMR: *Contra* for lonely people.

NN: You're not lonely. ◀

IT LIVES!

The word on the street (or, rather, superhighway) is that Microsoft will introduce a significant update to Xbox Live this spring, tentatively titled—gasp!—Xbox Live 3.0. The update is rumored to bring a number of enhancements, the most substantial of which will focus on communication and team/clan support.

Microsoft will introduce voice and text messaging, as well as voicemail, in any game that supports them. As for clan features, players reportedly will be able to join to create a single entity, motivating players to team up and play cooperatively. Statistics tracking will be updated as well to account for this; stats and records for teams created for online challenges can be carried through subsequent multiplayer bouts.

Xbox Live 3.0 may come with "offsite storage," allowing players to store up to 32K of personal data on Xbox Live servers. The big plus here is that players would be able to access this data from any Xbox connected to Xbox Live. In addition, a function that lets users transfer information across four "family" feature-supporting titles—i.e., developing a player in a college football game and then using the same player/character in three other titles—will be introduced.

More as we hear it... ◀
Evan Shamoon is an editor at Xbox Nation.

XB

PS2

⌄ [BLIPS]

SNK goes Xbox Live

Between its censored *King of Fighters* compilation and Sony's refusal to approve *Metal Slug 3*, SNK's PS2 debut fell a little flat. It may do better on Xbox, though. *SVC Chaos* is coming to Microsoft's console with Xbox Live support, and it's bringing along a straight port of *Slug 3*. *SVC Chaos* is SNK's riposte in the cross-company 2D fighting wars, starring familiar standards and out-there cameos like *Mega Man's* Zero. *Slug* needs no introduction—after all, it's the finest side-scrolling shooter in years. Neither title has a firm date beyond 2004.

GAMEPLANNER | MARCH 2004

ALL RELEASE DATES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE. SO IT'S NOT OUR FAULT!

IT'S MARCH MADNESS. ONLY WITH GAMES INSTEAD OF BASKETBALL

XB
PC
PS2
GBA
GC

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	01 The Suffering [PS2, XB], Tenchu: Return From Darkness [XB]	**02** Colin McRae Rally 04 [XB], Dead Man's Hand [PS2, XB], Lifeline [PS2], Mega Man Battle Chip Challenge [GBA], Drakengard [PS2], MTX Mototrax [PS2, XB], Mafia [XB]	**03** Phantasy Star Online Episode III: C.A.R.D. Revolution [GC], Gangland [PC]	**04**	**05** Ben Stiller? Owen Wilson? Vince Vaughn? Snoop? We're calling it now: Starsky & Hutch will be the best picture of 2004.	**06**
07	**08** Counter-Strike: Condition Zero and Lords of the Realm III for PC are out. It's OK, you don't have to walk to the store. You can run. Go on, run.	**09** Cy Girls [PS2], Firefighter F.D. 18 [PS2], Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes [GC], Kill.switch [PS2], All-Star Baseball 2005 [PS2, XB], and MVP Baseball 2004 [all]	**10**	**11**	**12** It's Mushreeshba's Day in Lesotho. King Moshoeshoe I united the Sotho clans in the early 19th century to form the Basotho nation. And now you know.	**13**
14	**15**	**16** Road Trip: Arcade [GC], Battlefield: Vietnam [PC], Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life [GC], UT 2004 [PC], MLG 2005 [PS2], Breakdown [XB], Samurai Jack [GB], Steel Battalion: LOC [XB]	**17**	**18**	**19**	**20**
21	**22** Pokémon Colosseum [GC], Unreal II: Blade Warriors [PS2], Devil or Alien: Ultimate [XB], and Fight Night 2004 [PS2, XB]	**23** Worms 3D [XB], ESPN Major League Baseball [PS2, XB], Far Cry [PC], Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow [XB], Final Fantasy XI [PC], Samurai Warriors [PS2]	**24** We're really itching for a squad-based tactical army shooter for Xbox. Oh, what's this? Full Spectrum Warrior? That'll do just fine.	**25**	**26** Ladykillers, the new Coen brothers movie, opens today. We'll probably like it, but can anything ever top The Big Lebowski? Jesus doesn't think so.	**27** If you need a reason to party tonight—beyond the fact that it's Saturday—we recommend celebrating the vernal equinox, also known as the first day of spring.
28	**29** Remember Destruction Derby from a few years ago? Yes? No? Well, the new one is out today for PS2. It's called Destruction Derby Arenas, and it's totally online.	**30** UFC: Sudden Impact [PS2], Crimson Sea 2 [PS2], Resident Evil: Outbreak [PS2], and Future Tactics [XB]	**31**		Look at me! I'm April 2! What am I doing here in March? This is crazy!	

Dead or Alive Ultimate is your link to   the future of fighting games…

The

Experience Dead or Alive® 2, completely redesigned on a brand new engine.

Future

Test your fighting skills in the world's first online "virtual arcade" for   3-D fighting fans.

Of

Features special Double Pack Collector's Set including DOA trading cards,   available only for a limited time.

Fighting

New interactive battle stages, never-before-seen costumes, and new movies.

Games

Play the original Sega Saturn version of Dead or Alive® released for the   first time in North America.

Exclusive bonus content, secrets revealed, and much, much more!

DEAD OR ALIVE®
ULTIMATE™

Double Pack Collector's Set

STICKERS
NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND A HIT IN JAPAN

● JAPAN

Considering that it was the Japanese who took the notion of a hot rod and turned it into an underground tuning-car culture in Japan, it's interesting to see things come full circle with a line of real-life specialty-market vinyls based on Electronic Arts' *Need for Speed Underground*. We talk to Art Factory Graphics' Hiroshi Sawada to discuss his company's sticky new product.

GMR: Why did you decide to make *Need for Speed Underground*-inspired vinyls?

HS: The *NFSU* unique in-game vinyls inspired me to do this. Seeing Japanese-style graphics created from a North American point of view was cool and unique to me.

GMR: In America, we have the impression that street racing is big in Japan, but supposedly it's kind of small. Do you see the genre growing in the future?

HS: Yes, because it is getting more popular. Of course, on the streets, it is not that easy. People do not bet money here, but friends gather and the racing begins. Japanese roads are narrow, so I think that is why we have developed strong drifting techniques.

GMR: What kind of car do you drive personally?

HS: I drive a Honda CRX Del Sol and a Toyota Supra. The Del Sol was not popular in Japan; it was too heavy for a compact car. Japanese people are too obsessed with driving fast (like with the GT-R). But I think if a car is cool enough it could even change your lifestyle—and that is a great thing. A Honda engine sound and a great audio system is cool enough for anyone! A bit of trivia about the car: In Japan the CRX had a unique transtop system. Did you know that? My Supra is a 2 replica, officially. It's the base model, not the turbo version, but it's still pretty cool with a wide body and 20-inch OZ racing rims. Which are reasonable to buy here in Japan.

GMR: If you could add one thing to *Need for Speed Underground*, what would it be?

HS: How about online shopping in the game? You could buy licensed parts like racing heart wheels, etc., and even *NFSU*-original parts! I think people would really like this. If there are parts that you only could buy online in the game, I think it would be exciting! ⏮

INTERNATIONAL REPORT

↗ Hiroshi Sawada (the blonde) is a rabid car enthusiast who seemingly has no problem creating ways for young Japanese street-racing fans to violate their vehicles. With *Need for Speed Underground* taking even EA by surprise with its massive success, we're happy to see its influence reach overseas, too.

STUFF RULES
WE ONLY GET THE GAMES. THEY GET THE STUFF

🔘 **JAPAN**

Living in America rocks. We've got pizza, Mountain Dew Code Red, and the Super Bowl, but in the relative scheme of things, Japan rocks even harder. This month, we look at pictures of items we don't own, partly to induce even greater inner sadness, and partly to remind U.S. publishers that we like cool sh*t, too. You know it!

➡️ Imagine yourself—a child or a teen—growing up in Tokyo, completely immune to all the cool crap that comes out on a seemingly monthly basis there. Why immune? Because it never stops coming. Limited-edition versions of games that offer, at the very least, different cover art, a soundtrack CD, or a cold-cast figure, or stickers, or a T-shirt, possibly an action figure, a special controller, or, well, you get the idea. Now imagine yourself—a child or a teen—growing up in North America, where you don't get so much as a whiff of the coolest stuff life has to offer. Don't worry, we're crying right along with you.

In case you're wondering what we're blabbing about, investigate with your eyes the pictures surrounding this lonely box. One premium item is Nintendo's Famicom-inspired GBA SP, which comes packaged with a buttload of old-school Nintendo classics in GBA form. Holla! Equally interesting is the limited run of laser-etched Sonic the Hedgehog cubes, released last year, as well as the more recent gold *Gundam* PS2 with customized mount, and the special *Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes* box set, which includes a platinum GameCube with Foxhound logo, matching controller, a copy of the game, and an emulated version of the original *Metal Gear* playable on the Cube. It makes us wanna holler! 🔁

← This crystal blue Xbox is enough to make a *GMR* editor gnaw his own foot off if it meant getting one. Baby hung y!
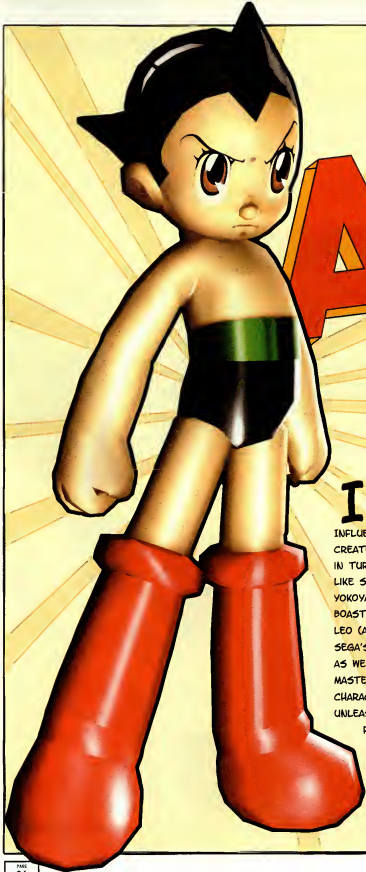
GMR TAKES A BOY WONDER
GAME BY SEGA

I T'S BEEN MORE THAN 50 YEARS SINCE ASTRO BOY
MADE HIS DEBUT AS A PERIPHERAL CHARACTER IN THE
LATE OSAMU TEZUKA'S COMIC STRIP *CAPTAIN ATOM*.
INFLUENCED BY THE CREATIONS OF WALT DISNEY, TEZUKA
CREATED AN EXTRAORDINARILY VAST BODY OF WORK THAT HAS
IN TURN INFLUENCED A LEGION OF JAPANESE MANGA ARTISTS,
LIKE SHOTARO ISHINOMORI (*CYBORG 009*) AND MITSUTERU
YOKOYAMA (*GIGANTOR*). WHILE TEZUKA'S MASSIVE CANON
BOASTS SUCH POPULAR CHARACTERS AS JUNGLE EMPEROR
LEO (AKA KIMBA THE WHITE LION), DORORO (THE SUBJECT OF
SEGA'S UPCOMING GAME *BLOOD WILL TELL*), AND BLACK JACK,
AS WELL AS THE SOURCE MATERIAL FOR THE MODERN ANIME
MASTERPIECE *METROPOLIS*, ASTRO BOY REMAINS HIS DEFINING
CHARACTER. HOW FITTING THEN THAT SEGA IS PRIMED TO
UNLEASH NOT ONE, BUT TWO ASTRO BOY GAMES: ONE FOR
PLAYSTATION 2, BY SONIC TEAM; THE OTHER, A GBA
COLLABORATION BETWEEN SEGA'S HITMAKER CREW AND
THE LEGENDARY DEVELOPMENT TEAM TREASURE.

First up is *Astro Boy* for PS2. Originally a United Game Artists (the
team responsible for cult hits *Space Channel 5* and *Rez*) project, *Astro
Boy* was, along with UGA producer Mineko Okamura, brought into the
Sonic Team stable once Sega started consolidating its various
development resources. UGA was out, Sonic Team was in.

RO BOY

LOOK INSIDE OSAMU TEZUKA'S TO SEE WHAT MAKES HIM TICK.

STORY BY JAMES MIELKE

Scheduled to be released this summer, Astro Boy's PS2 debut is being timed to coincide with his recent resurgence as a popular figure. While it doesn't take a genius to realize that he's more prominent in his country of origin (Japan) than he is in the United States, both Sega and Sony are banking on his iconic design and broad appeal to bring him to the forefront of today's pop culture. Folks who grew up in the '60s and '70s will recognize him as a symbol of their youth, while a younger audience will be drawn to Astro (also known as Mighty Atom in Japan) for his distinctive design and assortment of exciting robot powers.

The barrage doesn't start with Sega's efforts, though. Sega held back the game's U.S. release to allow the Sony Pictures Kids/WB Kids Saturday-morning TV show to educate its audience in the ways of Astro's world before unleashing Sonic Team's pièce de résistance on the game-buying public. Strategic savvy aside, Sega also wanted to avoid providing any spoilers, as *Astro Boy* the game encapsulates the majority of the TV show's episodic plot. How significant is

Astro's return to prime time? A source no less credible than the *Wall Street Journal* says that "Astro Boy is part of a growing taste for Japanese pop culture," while the *New York Daily News* says that without Astro Boy, young viewers "might not have enjoyed such current animated favorites as *Pokémon* and *Dragon Ball Z*." The WB network was so sure it had a huge hit on its hands that it bought up 25 episodes of the show (the usual commitment is 13 episodes), with an eye on an additional 25 if the series is successful.

Which brings us neatly back to *Astro Boy* by Sonic Team. An action game loosely based on the story line of Tezuka's seminal work, gamers may find similarities, however unintentional, to Konami's *Zone of the Enders*, Sony's *Ratchet & Clank*, and, most intriguingly, Sonic Team's own *NIGHTS Into Dreams*. The ZOE comparisons are easy to see. When he's not running around on the ground talking to civilians and other characters from the Tezuka universe (Tezuka comics employed an ensemble cast of characters that appeared in different books in

ASTRO BOY

different roles), Astro is almost certainly zooming around the skies of Metro City, propelled by the rockets in his feet. Like ZOE's Jehuty, Astro can fly around in any direction and dash sideways when necessary, although, it must be said, the show's pace is kinder and less epilepsy-inducing than Konami's effort.

The *Ratchet & Clank* similarity extends only to the size of Astro's futuristic Metro City, with the difference being that you can actually fly anywhere you want here. This city is, for lack of a more creative word, huuuuuge. The buildings in Metro City give new meaning to the word "skyscraper," and you can see all the way up and down. The game gives the player such a vast perspective that one would be forgiven for experiencing virtual vertigo. Still, if you can see it, you can go there, meaning that not only can you fly up and out to that zeppelin-sized whale ship floating through the sky, you can actually land on it and walk around.

The *NIGHTS Into Dreams* parallel comes from the absolute feeling of freedom you get from soaring through the uppermost reaches of Metro City (not to mention the ring-clearing/sky-bound time attack contests). At the touch of a button, Astro can rocket into the distance and grab cumulonimbus, or he can carve great sweeping circles into the sky with a flick of the analog controller. But *Astro Boy* is not merely the calculated sum of other games' distinguished parts. It is very much its own game—and unlike anything you've ever seen. You can thank Osamu Tezuka for that.

With a backstory as rich as you'll find in any

modern-day effort, *Astro Boy* is a mechanical makeover of *Pinocchio*. A father figure (in this case, the diabolical Dr. Tenma) creates a boylike construct to take the place of a dead son. But the invention has a heart, and through his travels Astro Boy becomes more human, if not in body, then in spirit. Although he gains powers and abilities through his experiences (and after every boss battle), it's not Astro's finger laser, his rocket boots, his X-ray vision, or his supersonic hearing that makes him so accessible—although those certainly don't hurt. In terms of his arsenal, Astro couldn't hold a candle to today's *Mech Assault*-tastic character designs. What makes him so easy to rally behind is his concern for others, his selfless nature—in essence, his humanity.

It is this very vulnerability and earnestness that leads him toward the other characters in the game for support and guidance, characters like his adopted "father," Dr. O'Shay (the director of the Ministry of Science), Epsilon; his sister, Zoran, Rock (also seen in *Metropolis*); and Big X. One character you'll meet, who actually had his own comic series, is Hosuke Sharaku, the three-eyed boy. Hosuke will introduce Astro to other characters, each with different mission objectives, throughout the game. These side quests gradually increase in difficulty, requiring players to use the additional powers that Astro gains in the game's principal missions.

But the characters Astro meets aren't all necessarily helpful. Take Astro's first major boss encounter. He has a not ever a character per se—it's Napnamite, Metro City's power plant! You see, when Astro was created, all of the city's

FUN FACT: ASTRO BOY USES THE SAVOX PHYSICS ENGINE, WHICH MAKES THINGS BOUNCE AS THEY SHOULD IN REAL LIFE. (READ EVERYTHING HAS WEIGHT.) DON'T BELIEVE US? PICK UP A CAR IN THE GAME AND CHUCK IT. YOU'LL SEE THAT IT REACTS JUST AS IT WOULD WERE YOU TO DO THAT IN REAL LIFE. OH WAIT.

ANTICIPATION^{XI}

FINAL FANTASY. XI
ONLINE

MARCH 2004

LIVE IN YOUR WORLD.
PLAY IN OURS.

PlayStation.2

www.us.playstation.com

ONLINE
BROADBAND AND DIALUP

HDD.
PlayStation.2

PlayOnline.

SQUARE ENIX.

TEEN
T
ESRB CONTENT RATING
Animated Blood
Violence
www.esrb.org

Game Experience May Change
During Online Play

ASTRO BOY

BEYOND THE HUGE, ARCHING MISSION OBJECTIVES, ASTRO BOY ALSO FEATURES DOZENS OF COLLECTIBLE CHARACTER CARDS, WHICH GIVE YOU ADDITIONAL BACKSTORY AND INFO (ALONG WITH THE ABILITY TO VIEW THEM IN FULL 3D). THE BEST GAMERS WILL ALSO UNLOCK A HOST OF FAST-PACED MINIGAMES TO PLAY
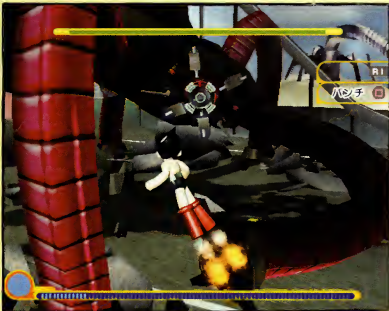
power was diverted, short-circuiting the Magnamite and sending it into a destructive frenzy. The goal is for Astro to put it down before it can destroy the city. A writhing mass of Dr. Octopus-style tentacles, the Magnamite's arms are Astro's first concern.

The beauty of the combat is that players can dispose of this beast in multiple ways. Astro can take the full-frontal approach and assault the spidery arms with fists of fury, or he can zoom in on the appendages and, by holding down the DualShock's Square button, grab hold of one of the flailing limbs and then rocket in the opposite direction until it snaps. Once this is done, the Magnamite proper erupts from the ground to give it one last shot. By pressing the L1 trigger to lock on to its target, Astro can again fly in and pound on the 'Mite's "eye." Or for maximum damage, Astro can put his feet on the ground and run over to the nearest vehicle, pick it up, and heave it into the beast's cyclopic lens. Once Astro has restored order and beaten the boss, he'll not

only gain strength in both his blue health bar and red force gauge (which drains with each use of his superbilities and regenerates with time), but he'll also unlock a new ability. With 10 to 15 major episodes to complete (each with significant layers and subquests), gamers will lock horns with plenty of stubborn boss characters, like Denkou, the timid superrobot whose optic camouflage can only be countered with Astro's X-ray vision. Naturally, Astro's most famous archnemesis, the Dr. Tenma-created Atlas (a robot designed to lead an army of uberrobots) comes into play at multiple points during the game, offering some of Astro Boy's most intense, fast-paced, and thrilling aerial battles.

Leave it to Sega to make the most of such an inspired license. Astro Boy is a beautiful, massive, fast-paced action game that would make Tezuka proud. It's a digital dissertation on heroism that narrows the gap between man and machine, proving that you don't need to be human to have a heart. A mighty atom indeed. ◀◙

TALK

ASTRO TEAM UNITED

With Sonic Heroes recently wrapped, all eyes turn toward Sonic Team's newest project, *Astro Boy* for PlayStation 2. We recently got together with Sonic Team impresario Yuji Naka and *Astro Boy* Producer Mineko Okamura over some hot wings and cheap suds to discuss what makes a boy robot tick, and the state of other Sonic Team franchises. They said things in Japanese, we pretended to understand. Here's what we think we said.

GMR: Most of the games Sonic Team has done have been for GameCube. Why the switch to PlayStation 2 as the platform of choice for *Astro Boy*?

YN: Simply stated, it was because I thought that the *Astro Boy* universe was suitable to the PlayStation 2 platform and the market it represents.

MO: The Sony Pictures group joined Tezuka to publish the *Astro Boy* TV anime project, so we thought that a co-promotion leveraging our relationship with Sony just made sense. Naturally, PlayStation 2 becomes the most suitable platform for the game.

GMR: The way in which Astro Boy flies around, dashing to and fro, reminds us of *NiGHTS*. Are the similarities intentional, or purely coincidental?

YN: The similarities between the two games are purely coincidental. Astro flying about freely in 3D space is definitely one of the key attractions in this game. Once it was created, I certainly felt it had an atmosphere that was somewhat similar to that of *NiGHTS*.

MO: It is totally coincidental. You might find similarities between the two titles

because they were both developed to be fun experiences based on quick character actions in the gameplay. We, of course, are flattered to hear this!

GMR: If *Astro Boy* is a success, will Sega continue to make more *Astro Boy* or Tezuka games?

YN: Sega has developed a strong, long-standing relationship with Tezuka Productions. If the game meets our expectations, achieving a high level of success, I think there will be a good possibility that we will continue the franchise.

GMR: Everyone loves a good puzzle game, and few games of this nature are as original and addictive as *ChuChu Rocket*. Where's our sequel?

YN: Yes, it is also a game I like very much, so I hope we will update *ChuChu Rocket* someday in the future! In the near future, you can expect Sonic Team to release another game based on the *Puyo* franchise in North America. So perhaps the puzzle addicts will be satisfied for this year.

GMR: Sonic Team seems to be the most prolific of all of Sega's development teams. What can we expect to see in the future from Sonic Team?

YN: I am not sure if we are the most prolific. It might seem as such because we have so many titles in our development schedule that happen to have fallen in the same period. We would like to continue to produce a number of titles that will keep gamers happy and entertained.

GMR: Will we ever see a conventional sequel to *Phantasy Star Online*? What do you think of games like *Final Fantasy XI*? Can you foresee a future where PSO expands into a massively multiplayer online experience?

YN: MMORPGs like *FFXI* are also very interesting and have possibilities. However, my feeling is that there also exists a market for fun online RPG franchises such as *PSO*, where players can enjoy adventures in which they take actions in real time.

GMR: How do you feel the gaming landscape has evolved in regard to gamers' tastes? As Western developers prove they can compete in the same genres once dominated by their Japanese counterparts, is it getting harder to find success?

YN: The gaming industry has obviously evolved in favor of Western development. I believe that Japanese developers should work harder to compete in the changing environment.

GMR: Is *Astro Boy*'s story original for PS2, or does it adapt a classic piece of *Astro Boy*'s manga history?

MO: It inherits the concept of an ideal relationship between human and robots from the TV series and manga, but we redesigned the story and some of its scenarios to suit the platform. The latter half of the

story is pretty much original.

GMR: *Astro Boy* began life as a United Game Artists (*Space Channel 5*, *Rez*) title. How much has the original game design changed since UGA was absorbed into Sonic Team?

MO: Nothing much has changed since the studios have merged. However, you could say that we are concentrating more on game development. UGA was located in Shibuya, where there are lots of fun things to do, whereas Sonic Team is located at Otori, near Haneda Airport, where there is only a McDonald's—you know what I mean? [Smiles] Sonic Team's new environment was good for us.

GMR: What is Sonic Team's design focus with *Astro Boy*?

MO: Astro can fly freely with great strength like Superman and he is powerful like Hulk, but he is a child and very small. These gaps are what make him attractive, so we have focused on a boylike, often mischievous flying action. He can fly everywhere in big 3D maps, and he can pull up a lamppost or lift a big car and use those items to beat enemies. We also wanted the character to possess realistic actions that leverage the Havok physics technology. This way, Astro can play catch in his house and have a lot of fun just like a real boy. Please get into *Astro Boy* and use this Astro character to do everything as you would as a superhero kid!

GMR: Growing up yourself, what sort of influence did Astro Boy have on your own life?

MO: When I was a little girl, I read all of Tezuka's mangas, so my heroes were several of his characters. Of course, Astro was already a huge hero in Japan, so I am most excited to reintroduce his character to a new generation of children. I am so happy to be involved in Tezuka's world using a new medium—a 3D videogame.

Sonic Team President Yuji Naka, Takashi "Sonic Heroes" Iizuka, and Mineko Okamura

TEZWHOKA

TEZUKA TIMELINE

Osamu Tezuka was one of the most influential cartoonists in the history of the galaxy. Documenting his work in one solitary page would be sheer madness, so that's exactly what we're going to do. These are some of the highlights in a career filled with dazzling moments. Like stars in the sky.

1928: Osamu Tezuka is born in Toyonaka City near Osaka.

1947: *New Treasure Island*, based on the story by Robert Louis Stevenson, becomes Tezuka's first hit comic, selling 400,000 copies.

1951: After finishing medical school, Tezuka debuts Astro Boy as a supporting character in his strip *Captain Atom.*

1954: Tezuka begins his magnum opus, the science-fiction epic *Phoenix*. An extended meditation on the human condition over thousands of years of history, it was never completed, although Tezuka periodically produced new installments over the next 25 years.

1958: Tezuka writes and directs his first animated movie, an adaptation of the Chinese legend Hsi Yu Chi (more often spelled Saiyuki).

1939: Tezuka draws his first comic, *A Night in China*, and shares it with his teachers at school. He also invents his pen name by adding a character for "insect" to his real name—insects were one of his favorite hobbies.

1950: Tezuka debuts *Jungle Emperor Leo* (the inspiration behind Disney's *The Lion King* in *Manga Shonen*.

1952: Astro Boy gets his own solo series in the *Manga Shonen* anthology, which runs for an amazing 18 years as Japan's most popular comic strip. *Princess Knight*, a fantasy series about a young prince in a girl's body, becomes one of the first popular Japanese comic strips aimed at a female audience.

1957: Astro Boy makes his first TV appearance—not as a cartoon, but as a puppet show.

1959: The Fuji TV network debuts with the *Astro Boy* puppet series as one of its flagship programs.

1978: The Seibu Lions baseball team adopts Leo as its mascot.

1974: The 30th anniversary of Tezuka's career as a published artist is marked by a museum exhibition in Tokyo and a feature issue of *Shukan Shonen* magazine.

1977: The Tezuka Osamu Award is established by publisher Shueisha to recognize the best young artist of the year. It's later won by stars like Inoue Takehiko (*Vagabond, Slam Dunk*) and Nobuhiro Watsuki (*Rurouni Kenshin*).

1965: While *Astro Boy* remains a hit, Tezuka debuts *Big X, Wonder Three*, and *Jungle Emperor Leo* on Fuji TV.

1963: On New Year's Day, Fuji broadcasts the first *Astro Boy* episode on TV. It becomes an instant hit and rises to top ratings. More than 50 episodes air through the rest of the year, and it becomes the first well-known Japanese cartoon in the United States.

1972: Tezuka's career is so prolific that a Kodansha-published collection of his work fills some 300 volumes.

1973: *Black Jack*, Tezuka's most popular series during the '70s, debuts in *Shonen Champion*, chronicling the adventures of a legendary freelance surgeon.

1969: *Dororo* debuts on Fuji TV after the comic's first appearance in 1967, and Tezuka's *Thousand and One Nights* becomes one of Japan's most acclaimed films of the year.

1966: *Astro Boy* reaches more than 90 episodes on television, and a full-length film hits Japanese theaters. Tezuka inaugurates the annual Mushi Productions film festival, for which he crafts several original short films over the coming years.

1980: *Astro Boy* makes a comeback as a new TV series. Tezuka storyboards the first episode.

1985: The Japanese art world recognizes the 40th year of Tezuka's career. Though his output slows during the '80s, Tezuka's production company continues to release new animated creations, and he remains a major figure in Japan's popular culture.

1989: After chronic bouts of hepatitis over the past few years, Tezuka passes away of stomach cancer at the age of 60. He posthumously receives the Order of the Sacred Treasure from the Japanese government, as well as the Special Prize of the 10th Japan Science Fiction Grand Prix. Animation based on his work, including a new *Jungle Emperor Leo* series and several *Black Jack* movies, continues to air throughout the year and into the '90s.

1981: *Animage* magazine recognizes Tezuka with its third annual Animation Grand Prix Special Award for his lifetime contributions to comics and animation.

1988: In December, Tezuka publishes his last major work, the concluding volume of his series based on Goethe's *Faust*.

1977: The *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper establishes the Tezuka Osamu Culture Prize to recognize the best manga of the year. Its first winners are Fujiko F. Fujio, creator of *Doraemon*, and shoujo science-fiction artist Moto Hagio.

2001: The new film version of *Metropolis* makes the rounds at theaters in the United States, sparking new interest in Tezuka's work. When asked how Tezuka might have reacted to the film, director Rin Taro freely admits that he'd hate it.

2002: The *Astro Boy* comic series is reprinted in English. Dark Horse Comics has published 20 volumes and counting.

Because 'TOP SECRET' always looks good on your resume.

Get the kind of high-tech training that always shows up on employers' radar. To learn more, log on the Life Accelerator at navy.com or call 1-800-USA-NAVY.

NAVY
accelerate your life.

BLOOD WILL TELL

PIECE BY PIECE

TEZUKA'S DORORO COMES TO LIFE AS BLOOD WILL TELL

The hero of Osamu Tezuka's *Dororo* gets about as raw a deal as anyone in the history of world literature. Far from just having a lousy childhood, he's actually screwed before he's born. We all have issues with our parents, but few of us can say that our fathers sold 48 of our body parts to a legion of demons and left us to die as the next step up the evolutionary ladder from a tadpole. That's the fate of Hyakkimaru, the warrior at the center of both the '60s-vintage *Dororo* comic and *Blood Will Tell*, the stylish American title of the PS2 game inspired by the comic.

After being born as something almost, but not quite, completely inhuman, Hyakkimaru was rescued by a wise monk who managed to outfit him with enough prosthetics to function. He grew into a wandering swordsman—in part because society rejected his deformity, but also because he had a chance to get the rest of his body back. The plot hook driving both the comic and the game is that those 48 demons—one for each of his missing parts—are still out there, as is his father,

By Dave Smith

now Japan's supreme warlord. Each demon Hyakkimaru kills gives him a piece of his anatomy back, and a reckoning with his father may not be far behind.

So why isn't the story called *Hyakkimaru*? Well, any good hero needs a sidekick, and that's where the comic's title comes from. Dororo is a young pickpocket and a vagabond like Hyakkimaru, and she wanders along with the hero both in the story and the game. The warrior may be at the center of the action, but the kid provides the personality that Hyakkimaru might be a little short on (along with limbs, organs, and all the rest).

Dororo was one of the later works of Tezuka's heyday; Hyakkimaru debuted in the pages of *Shonen Sunday* in 1967, a good 15 years after Astro Boy became a star. By modern standards, though, *Dororo*'s style is just a little bit too cartoony for a serious supernatural action game, so a key step in Sega's development of the game was finding a more modern style of design for both Hyakkimaru and the demons he fights.

That style came from contemporary manga star Hiroaki Samura, famous in Japan and the United States for his violent, rough-edged samurai story *Blade of the Immortal*. The game is based on Tezuka's source material—namely his story and character concepts—but Samura's artwork inspires the visual style, which trades the smooth, simple, Disney-esque lines of the original story for more realistic details and a harder edge. Samura's designs also draw on imagery from Japanese history and folklore, so the bad guys are echoes of mythological beasts such as the kappa, the tengu, and even lesser-known monsters.

Blood Will Tell impressed players with its

BLOOD WILL TELL

DORORO

style right out of the gate, but that style was almost all it had when it debuted at the 2003 Tokyo Game Show. The demo version was visually together—Hyakkimaru's attack animations were impressive, blending flowing combinations with *Shinobi*-style tate scenes, and even the first level effectively mixed indoor and outdoor environments while keeping the camera direction together. But all the stylish violence and smooth water effects couldn't hide the fact that it was a little low on gameplay depth to set it apart from a field full of hack-n-slash action games. That, Sega promises, was only a temporary condition. The finished version will draw its depth from

the basis of the story—Hyakkimaru's search to get his body back.

When the game begins, Hyakkimaru doesn't have much more than his swords, a pair of blades sheathed inside his wooden prosthetic arms. As he fights through the demons and gets his bits back, he earns new weapons and abilities from both more advanced prosthetics and reacquired organs. Extras for his inorganic arsenal include explosives, a sheathed arm cannon, and a long-range sickle and chain, while new organs have a subtler effect. Getting his stomach back, for instance, improves his health regeneration.

Although *Blood Will Tell* is an action game at heart, mixing up the slashfest with the weirdest possible twist on *Metroid* might be what it takes to pull it ahead of a crowded pack. *Shinobi* and *Nightshade* have their retro cool, *Samurai Warriors* has Koei's stamp of historical inspiration, and *Bujingai* has enough flash for half a dozen games, but depth and progression are some qualities we've been missing from the past year's round of 3D action entries. And if this is a success, who knows what Tezuka classics we might see in the next couple of years? His 40 years of classic comics include some concepts even stranger than that in *Blood Will Tell*. ◄►

> ►The basic version of Hyakkimaru's arm, shown in the prerendered *Blood Will Tell* trailer (above), contains a sharp katana blade sheathed below the elbow. Later gameplay trailers show off some handy upgraded versions, though—for instance, he can loss one of the blade-equipped arms in favor of an explosive-machine-gun arm. Exactly how Hyakkimaru gets hold of a bionic automatic weapon in Hanamachi-era Japan is a question the development team has yet to answer, however.

OMEGA FACTOR

POCKET ROCKET

THE ASTRO AND THE OMEGA FACTOR

Throw high concept and pretense out the window. *Astro Boy: Omega Factor* is coming to do one thing and one thing only: provide the sickest blast of old-school 2D gaming you've seen in ages.

Sure, the recent *Castlevania* and *Metroid* games of late do a damn good job of that, but with *Omega Factor*, we're talking about a time warp back to the ass-kicking days of the Sega Genesis. True that.

Every geeky 2D effect you could imagine is here, along with an innovative weapons system, stunning graphics, great music, razor-sharp controls, a cool character-collection system (which unlocks famous Tezuka creations in an encyclopedic character-dictionary mode), and the great nonstop action and furious boss battles Treasure is known for.

That's right, the very same Treasure responsible for classic action titles such as *Gunstar Heroes*, *Dynamite Headdy*, and *Silhouette Mirage*, as well as recent hits such as *Ikaruga* and the upcoming *Gradius V*. But Treasure didn't work alone—*Omega Factor* was produced and codeveloped by Hitmaker (the development wing of Sega known for its *Crazy Taxi*, *Virtual-On*, and *Virtua Tennis* games). Together, they are responsible for *Astro Boy: Omega Factor*, and to find out what makes this game tick, we talked with Tez Okano, director at Hitmaker.

GMR: How was it creating a brand-new game based on a classic Tezuka license?

Tez Okano: To the Japanese *otaku* [maniacs], it is truly a dreamlike opportunity. The agreement between Sega and Tezuka Productions is extremely special because it allows us to create stories using all the characters in Tezuka's works, not just Astro Boy. The comparative sentiment in America would be something like a license to develop stories based on all heroes from the Marvel and DC comics worlds combined. You can see then why we are so excited.

GMR: What was your working relationship with Treasure on this title title? What was Hitmaker responsible for, and what was Treasure's role?

The overall directions, like rough specs, stage structures, and story, were done by me. While we wanted to entrust the staff at Treasure with everything, our development schedule was tight, so we outlined the story on the Hitmaker side. Treasure responded well to this unorthodox approach, creating the refreshing and balancing aspects of the actions that are the soul of the game.

In other words, you'll be able to unlock your true potential and POWER UP.

LIFE
PUNCH
LASER
SHOT
SENSOR

OMEGA FACTOR

GMR: While Treasure has certainly developed plenty of games for Sega consoles, it's been a while since it developed a game for Sega. Was it fun to rekindle that sort of partnership in this new era?

TO: It was very exciting! I am a great Treasure fan and have always wanted to work with them. When it was determined that the *Astro Boy: Omega Factor* game was to be developed by an outside developer, I gladly contacted Treasure, thinking this was the perfect opportunity for us to partner with them. I was just overwhelmed by the positive attitude at Treasure and their approach of "If it is not fun, there is no point in creating a game." Although recent games tend to be mere products, Treasure's game-development philosophy took me back to the basics of game development: Concentrate first and foremost on making the game as fun as possible.

GMR: Who would win in a fight—Astro Boy or Dynamite Headdy?

TO: I asked the main programmer, Yaiman, this question, and he firmly replied, "Astro Boy is stronger!" Besides attacks like punches or kicks, Astro can use the Zero Teleport that was featured in *Alien Soldier*, as well as Finger Beam, and moreover, he has more powerful weapons, like the Arm Cannon. About whether he is indeed stronger than Headdy, please purchase the game and come to your own conclusion!

GMR: *Omega Factor* just might be the most beautiful GBA game we've ever seen. Is the hardware similar to, oh, the Sega Saturn's? Or is it a whole different slab of technology?

GMR: I have asked Yaiman about this, too, and he says the GBA is closer to the SNES than the Sega Saturn. [Yaiman was involved in developing *Contra Spirits* and *Castlevania* on SNES.] I assume what makes *Astro Boy's* graphics stand out is the use of translucence, which can be attributed in large part to the ability of the main designer, Naokiman.

GMR: Was *Omega Factor's* dev team the usual Treasure size of two or three people? If so, that's incredible.

TO: Well, it was, at least at first. But since the development schedule was very tight, a total of more than 10 members worked on the project, including people outside the regular team. I believe that pulling all of this talent together helped create the quality game that we have.

GMR: Between *Astro Boy* and *Dororo,* it seems to be a great time for Tezuka-based videogames. What other Tezuka licenses do you think would make great videogames? *Black Jack,* perhaps?

TO: While Osamu Tezuka is regarded as the "God of Manga," his influence extends beyond that. I feel he has a presence that represents Japanese culture in the 20th century. When it comes to making his works into games, I suppose it would be difficult to top *The Phoenix.* It would be fun to develop titles such as *Next World, Prime Rose, Ambassador Magma,* and *The Devil Garon.*

GMR: *Omega Factor* has a lot of references to old Treasure games, like the *Gunstar Heroes* sign in the background of the first stage. Did the original *Gunstar* team develop *Omega Factor*?

TO: Yaiman was the main programmer of *Gunstar*! As for the *Gunstar Heroes* sign in the background of the first stage, I drew it on a lark, and I am so glad that I did. Also, Non, who worked on the music, was also on the *Gunstar* team. In *Omega Factor,* I had them put in a tune from the BGM of *Gunstar Heroes* during the climax scene, so listen for it! Adding to this, we included fun items for Treasure maniacs here and there, such as Pook, who transforms into five figures like he does in *Seven Force* [we used only five transformations instead of seven because it is based on the *Alien Soldier* version], or Epsilon, who attacks with a laser similar to the one used by the hero in *Alien Soldier.*

GMR: Another Tezuka character, Hosuke Sharaku, the three-eyed boy, is unlockable in the game. Why did you choose him as an unlockable surprise?

TO: Very nice question! After thinking about this, I remembered the "Ancient Prince" Sharaku, who overwhelmed Astro in *Marine Express.* [This is a special TV program that aired in 1979 and is said to be one of Tezuka's best animated works.] Sharaku plays a very important role in *Omega Factor,* as he is Astro's greatest enemy. But Sharaku is just the beginning. A total of 47 characters from Tezuka's works appear in this title. I think that many characters will still be unfamiliar to those outside of Japan, but you can learn about each character in the character dictionary in Options! Please enjoy this game as an introduction to Tezuka's works. ►

→ If you think these screenshots are pretty, then wait until you see the game in action. OMFG! If for some reason you don't already have a Game Boy Player for your GameCube, you might want to slide out and pick one up. This game warrants playing on the big screen—it looks that good. Of course, it also plays, like the Boe's knees. What do bee knees play like? Pick up *Omega Factor* and find out.

The Most RADICAL Games of 2003

adventur

fighting

ion

old skool

sports

extreme sports

shooters

strategy

racing

01

It's that time of year when *GMR* reflects back on the previous year's game releases and ponders "what was that all about?" Some games, like *Panzer Dragoon Orta*, seem as though they came out a billion years ago, but nope, that was 2003. So, what moved us in mysterious ways? Don't let the scores we gave these games fool you. It's only after the dust settles, the buzz of New Year's Eve has worn off, and Gerry's washed all that lipstick off his collar (he put it there himself, he ain't foolin' no one) that we can really sit back and say, "That game kicked my butt...in a good way." What one reviewer thought might not outweigh the collective mindset by the time we hit '04. Or after 12 months have crept by, *Dark Cloud 2* might not resonate the way that *Breath of Fire: Dragon Quarter* still does. So, welcome to *GMR*'s inaugural Most Radical Games celebration. This is the shiznoz that we're still playing. This is the freakiest, 'fro-iest, most fantasticus stuff of the bunch. It's the funk, the flavor, and the fuzzy dice of that grand old era we like to call "last year." Who won what and why did they win it? Are we serious when we say red is better than blue? Well, it always has been and always will be, but for now it's time we revealed our hand... ▮→

page
49

old school

wario ware, inc.
gba

Shake!

Seemingly built for the ADD generation, Nintendo's *Wario Ware* is the sickest (we mean that in a good way, parents) collection of straw-grabbing, punching-bag-avoiding, asteroid-shooting, button-pushing games (none of which are over five seconds long, thanks) we've ever seen. *Wario Ware* is like the White Castle of videogames, except that it's not made out of beef. Make of that what you will. We speak in tongues.

runners-up
ikaruga
pac-man vs.

adventure

beyond good & evil
gc// pc// ps2// xb

Apparently, the person holding this magazine does not actually read the magazine. If you had, you might remember all the very nice things we said about *Beyond Good & Evil*. If any of that had sunk in, then perhaps *BG&E* might have sold more than 14 copies. OK, so a photo-taking babe and her walking pig uncle might be a focus group's nightmare, but that's exactly why we like it. That and the fact that its cohesive widescreen vision and innovative play mechanics make for an absolutely compelling experience. Pick it up on the cheap now. OK, bye.

runners-up
broken sword: the sleeping dragon
deus ex: invisible war
fatal frame ii
the legend of zelda: the wind waker

strategy

disgaea
ps2

We're siding with the cat on this one. The cat says, "*Final Fantasy Tactics Advance* is incredibly deep, offers a billion hours of gameplay, and is portable like a mo-fo, but it ain't no *Disgaea*." What other game lets you throw exploding penguins, has an innovative Geo Panel system, boasts a mad-funny script, and lets you raise your characters up to level 9,999? None! The cat wins! Meow.

runners-up
advance wars 2
final fantasy tactics advance

party games

karaoke revolution
ps2

Yeah, yeah. We've played all the other games where you push the buttons and walk the walk. Big whoop, party games! You're not the boss of us. If you were, then why have we been subjecting all of our friends to our tone-deaf renditions of "It's the End of the World As We Know It"? Because making fools of ourselves rocks, and you know it! Now give me that microphone. It's my turn.

runners-up
amplitude
mario party 5

extreme sports

tony hawk's underground
gc// ps2// xb

Yeah, expectations might not have been über-high for Tony from the block. But Activision, or more accurately, Neversoft pulled out all the stops for T-Lo on *THUG*. Create just about any character you can imagine, ditto for parks, ditto for moves, ditto for FUN! *Wakeboarding Unleashed* took us by surprise though, and if it had offered a few more features, it might have usurped the Hawkman.

runners-up
ssx 3
wakeboarding unleashed

fighting

virtua fighter 4: evolution
ps2

Soul Calibur II was everywhere and seemingly all things to all people, but we love our *Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution* big time. Nothing against *SC2*, but *VF4Evo* is easy enough for total newbs to pick up and play (important), but it's also unfathomably deep, so veterans can continue to learn new tricks. Plus, it's 20 bucks and lets us dress up our characters in furry wigs. That's gotta count for something.

runners-up
guilty gear xx
soul calibur ii

sports

nba street vol. 2
ps2

This was a tough decision, with games like *NHL Hitz Pro* knocking teef (that's "teeth" for people with no teef) and *Top Spin* slapping balls left and right, this genre was a hot one. Naturally, *Madden*, the Rolls-Royce of sports games, was omnipresent, but yo, *NBA Street Vol. 2* was the shizmoz. You can't imagine how many times we put down former *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine* editor Todd Zuniga on this one. Oh, and what, Todd? Yeah, you heard us.

runners-up
madden 2004
top spin

racing

mario kart: double dash!!
gc

Apparently, a lot of you folks like to lean out your window on the highway, and throw banana peels at the cars behind you. Or maybe that's just us. Play it safe, people! Why throw your compost at actual truckers when you can litter from the safety of your GameCube? You spend so much time chucking stuff in *MKDD*, they should have named this *Chuck: The Game* instead. The new dual-character syste n adds extra strategy to an already excellent game. Besides, The Fist really likes Peach. He's so cute like that.

runners-up
f-zero gx
moto gp 2
need for speed underground
project gotham racing 2

mmorpg

final fantasy xi
pc

The fact that Milky stays at the office until the wee hours of the morning playing *FFXI* is as awesome as it is very, very sad. Just wait till the PS2 version hits, we'll never see him again. Better looking than any other MMORPG out there and fantastically deep, you could play for months and still see only some 30 percent of what the game offers. Worth the time, worth the money, honey. Love you, babe.

runners—up
planetside
star wars galaxies

rpg

star wars: knights of the old republic
pc// xb

Final Fantasy has had it good enough the past few years that it can move over for just a second, thanks. Besides, you can't deny the effect *KOTOR* had, not only on an RPG-starved console (nice one, Microsoft), but on the genre as a whole. *KOTOR* offers a steller cast of expertly realized characters and one of the deepest, most innovative sets of play mechanics seen in an RPG.

runners—up
kotor: dragon quarter
mario & luigi

action

viewtiful joe
gc

We have never, ever seen a game like this. Yes, it performs all the duties required of an action-platforming sonavab****. But *Viewtiful Joe* takes all the core principles of the de facto action brawler and expands the concept to the point where it must get a new pair of pants. The pantless may wonder what all the hoopla is about, but know this: An unbelievable 2D storybook art style, an enthusiastically voice-acted cast of characters, and more invention in one game than the genre has seen in years equals snappy, stylish fun. Amazingness on a 3-inch disc.

runners—up
panzer dragoon orta
prince of persia: the sands of time
ratchet & clank 2: going commando
the simpsons: hit & run

shooter

rainbow six 3
xb

It's not perfect, and the A.I. is alternately insanely difficult and bordering on retarded, but *Rainbow Six 3* is man stuff, and we mean that in the best way possible. No other game captures the feel of strapping on Kevlar (as we often do in the office, especially when Gerry starts hitting the bottle) and slapping in another clip. It's when you're hugging the side of a barn and throwing on the thermal that you feel like an absolute superstar.

runners—up
socom ii
tron 2.0

best console games

gba
final fantasy tactics advance

See what the cat said in the *Disgaea* story. *Tactics* features a small busload of characters and an infinitely deep customization system, offering, according to Tom Byron, one million hours of gameplay.

gc
viewtiful joe

Joe, we have to say it. We love you. If it weren't for that pesky *KOTOR*, you'd have gotten Most Radical Game of the Year. You're handsome, a laugh riot, and you got style, kid! Henshin a-go-go, baby!

pc
kotor

OK, PC gamers, we get it. Bioware has nuclear-powered design skills and can even put the shine back on the moribund *Star Wars* license, courtesy of this groundbreaking RPG.

ps2
need for speed underground

If we enjoyed doing any one thing this year, it was slapping the dragon on our wagon and letting that beast go! *NFSU* filled the gap that *Ridge Racer* left behind. Nicely done, chaps.

xb
kotor

OK, we're starting to run out of things to say about this very nice game where players can choose their course by being oh so evil or a patsy goody-two-shoes. Fine, be that way.

game of the year
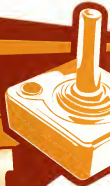
star wars: knights of the old republic
pc// xb

The post-release hype and all the subsequent awards for *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* had gotten so out of control that we briefly considered choosing another game, *Viewtiful Joe*, for 2003's Most Radical Game of the Year. But after our self-imposed backlash to the hype had settled down and we fired up *KOTOR* to give it another spin, we realized that it truly is, in fact, the Most Radical Game of the Year (Sorry, Capcom, we love you and *Joe* too–See GameCube and Action MRGOTY).

But with *KOTOR* we got an epic quest that started off humbly enough. You're hurled into a donnybrook of galactic proportions straight out of the gate (sort of like in *Halo*, but with *Star Wars* guys) and don't really have much time to think about your place in things–just that you have to come to grips with the game's well-paced and considerate controls and combat mechanics in a hurry before you get lasered to death. As you begin to fold additional characters into your crew, the game's extraordinarily deep dialogue system draws you in like no other RPG before it.

The game is as good it made us give a crap about *Star Wars* again (you have Anakin and Padmé to thank for kicking us off the wagon), and seeing the tangible effects your valiant or sinister actions had on your character made playing through this 50-hour RPG a second time practically mandatory. Playable in nearly any order you choose and offering differing events and perspectives depending on your course of action, *KOTOR* is one of the most pliable, enthralling RPGs ever designed. Sure, *KOTOR* has only like three NPCs and absolutely none of their headgear looks cool, and we're still waiting for that downloadable content for the Xbox version, thanks. But even if it wasn't already the best RPG released last year, it also has "the twist". You know what we mean. And if you don't, then why are you reading this? You should be playing *KOTOR* ! ▶

GMR officially RADICAL 2003

53

NEXT

⚠ WARNING! HAZARDOUS MATERIAL

Here at *GMR*, we preview games a little differently. To ensure that our previews are as relevant as possible, we feature only titles that will be released within six months. We also record our level of excitement about each game with cool little flames. Previews are not reviews—they're merely a guide as to how good a game in progress is looking. They're snapshots. If we're not very excited about a game, it gets one or two flames. If we're taking a wait-and-see attitude, expect to see three flames. Over and above that, you can bet we're pretty excited. It's our duty to tell you what we think at every stage of a game's development cycle—positive, negative, or somewhere in between.

INCOMING GAMES PREVIEWED

➦ PREVIEWED THIS ISSUE:

RELEASE | MAY

ONIMUSHA 3: DEMON SIEGE
THE POWER OF THREE

□SYSTEM PS2   □PUBLISHER CAPCOM   □DEVELOPER CAPCOM

And so it begins. Later this spring (May, to be precise), when *Onimusha 3* is quietly inserted into hundreds of thousands (if not millions) of PS2s, gamers all over North America will be treated to the most stunning computer-generated cinematic opening ever seen in a videogame. It's so amazing that it makes the opening cinemas for games like *Final Fantasy X*, *Ridge Racer Type 4*, *Soul Blade*, and *Resident Evil: Code Veronica* seem trifling by comparison.

What other CG movie starts things off with a close-up of the brain of a brawny brine battle-shrimp, some 200 feet tall, as it stampedes past the rank and file of the Genma clan's undead forces? Not many. Nor do many cinemas interrupt the shellfish fiasco with the sudden appearance of a masked ninja warrior as he beheads and besplits the surging tide of incoming hostiles with his fluid katana, then vaults to the top of the shrimp ship, only to come crashing down into the

crustacean's main quarters. The two pig soldiers who commence with spear-waving hysterics are agile in the way only pig soldiers choreographed by the incredible Donnie Yen (*Iron Monkey*, *Rush Hour 2*) and directed by Takashi Yamazaki can be. To watch the unmasked Samanosuke lunge, parry, and deflect blows, with or without a weapon, is nothing short of staggering. When the pumped-up Garuganto emerges from the green ooze to take care of business, things

escalate to bone-crushing levels. This gorgeous piece of work was done by the artists at ROBOT (*Returner*), the CG house responsible for the opening cinemas in the first two games, and it features all the signature *Onimusha* moves we've come to know intimately over the past few years.

If the version we've been playing is any indication, *Onimusha 3* will rock from front to back. Once the game proper starts, we find hero Samanosuke at the familiar Honnoji

55

← The guy with the skin problem is Gurugardo (who can be unlocked in Capcom's *Onimusha Blade Warriors* as a playable character—see this month's review for more info), and his epic battle with Samanosuke in the game's opening moments sets the tone for the remainder of *Onimusha 3*. Does he get his butt kicked? Yeah.

PS2
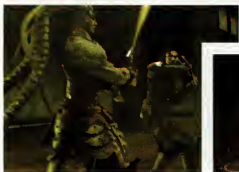
Temple, where he is helping the local militia turn back Oda Nobunaga's demonic forces. By the time he reaches the legendary Japanese tyrant, and after a short encounter with one of Nobunaga's subordinates, Samanosuke finds himself engulfed by a swirling black vortex. He's whisked off to modern-day France, where the droopy-dog persona of Jean Reno's Jacques Braun, a Parisian Special Forces officer, is found trying to come to grips with the chaos that surrounds him. The

Genma are being air-dropped into Paris near the Arc de Triomphe, and they're slaughtering the populace en masse. As Jacques races to the aid of a fallen comrade, he too is sucked into the vortex and transported back to feudal Japan.

A few significant differences separate this final part of the *Onimusha* trilogy from its predecessors. First, gone are the prerendered backgrounds in favor of beautiful, fully 3D backdrops. Series producer Keiji Infune's dev team has

built this game engine from the ground up specifically for PS2, and it shows in the game's detailed, dynamic environments that, while still viewed from fixed perspectives, are brought to life thanks to the camera's subtle undulations.

The other major upgrade is the inclusion of analog control, which in practice feels just as tight and responsive as the first two games' strictly digital controls, while offering more user-friendly ergonomics.

Also, according to Infune, the

North American and European versions of *O3* will feature extra-violent animations (decapitations, etc.) and bonus features not included in the Japanese release. Good news for us, surely, and certainly worth the two-month delay between the Japanese and U.S. releases. Expect big things from this one when the game ships this May. ∰

GTHA SAYS → *Onimusha 3* is so hot, it makes us want to whip our friends.

→ HOW HOT... ♦♦♦♦♦

RELEASE | JULY

FRONT MISSION 4
A FOURTH TO BE RECKONED WITH

□SYSTEM PS2 □PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX □DEVELOPER SQUARE ENIX

Looking at *Front Mission 4*, you might be fooled into thinking that the PS2 has changed this series. Walk in during one of its slick real-time cinema scenes and you'll see what looks like a smooth, fast-paced action game. But those are the cinemas—actually play the game and you're right back home in 1995, when mechs were mechs and strategy went a turn at a time.

Front Mission 4 is an evolution, then, not a revolution. The changes in this sequel are the kind that will be critical to gearheads—the eject feature is gone, and it's harder to force a surrender from enemy Wanzers, which make salvaged parts much more precious—but mostly invisible to players who've turned their attention to other genres since the 2000 release of *Front Mission 3*.
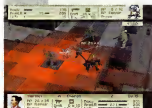
This is a very stylish presentation of familiar material, though. Character designer Yusuke Naora—late of *Unlimited SaGa*—has found a fertile field for his talents here, adapting to a realistic near-future setting while still creating beautiful artwork. And while the hardcore may find fault with some of the new game system's guts, *Front Mission 4*'s longevity isn't likely to disappoint. Between two interlocking stories, each with its own lead character, and a "new game+" feature for easier replays of the game, dozens of hours of mechanized warfare await. ⑮

GMA SAYS → If you know *Front Mission*, you're already convinced, and if you like the classic strategy, you'll need little convincing

→ **HOW HOT...** ✦✦✦

RELEASE | OCTOBER

THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS
WAKE UP, THERE'S A NEW NIGHTMARE

□SYSTEM PS2 □PUBLISHER CAPCOM □DEVELOPER CAPCOM PRODUCTION STUDIO 3

What gave this material such a cult following? *The Nightmare Before Christmas* came and went 10 years ago, and Disney has put forward no unusual effort to keep its memory alive. Likely it's the simple uniqueness of Jack Skellington and company—in the last decade we haven't seen anything quite like them.

Capcom is prepared to do that unique style justice in its 3D adaptation. It comes from an unusual development team—Tatsuya Minami's Production Studio 3, fresh off *Breath of Fire*—but it's hard to argue with the results the team has shown so far. Crafted with the aid of art director Dean Taylor, who worked on the original film, it really does look like Halloweentown. It's not a remake of the film, though, but a proper sequel that picks up where the story left off.

With the new plot also comes *Nightmare*'s central gameplay gimmick, which is hard to describe before you've seen it in motion. Jack is armed with what the developers call "rubber soul," a wad of green goo with a handful of uses. It's like killer Silly Putty—Jack can grab enemies and objects, swing them around, or swing from them himself. This is an odd place to see echoes of *Bionic Commando*, but some stray Capcom design DNA seems to have left its mark on the new *Nightmare*. ⑮

GMA SAYS → It's still a good nine months away, but with this talent in charge, this game looks just crazy enough to work

→ **HOW HOT...** ✦✦✦✦

SOLDNER

□SYSTEM PC □PUBLISHER ENCORE □DEVELOPER WINGS SIMULATIONS

If there's one thing FPS fans love it's mass destruction. *Soldner* has this in spades. This Battlefield-esque military shooter features destructible structures and terrain, along with six character classes and far too many weapons and vehicles to count. *Soldner*'s massive multiplayer support (up to 128 players) and engaging single-player mode promise plenty of good old-fashioned carnage.

RELEASE | SPRING

→ **HOW HOT...** ✦✦✦

DRIV3R

THANK YOU. DRIVE THROUGH

☐SYSTEM PC/PS2/XB ☐PUBLISHER ATARI ☐DEVELOPER REFLECTIONS INTERACTIVE

▶ Amid the swarm of popular media and irate Haitians swirling about *Grand Theft Auto*'s rampant success, it's easy to forget that the "drive around and raise hell" genre as we know it wouldn't exist without *Driver*. The game's 1999 debut was a breath of fresh air for people who were sick of the original overhead-view *GTA* after 10 minutes—with its gritty 3D visuals and *T.J. Hooker*–style car chases, *Driver* proved that there really was lasting fun to be found in violating traffic ordinances. *Driver 2*, however, was a misstep for the developers at Reflections: The PlayStation couldn't handle what they wanted to implement, and the result was a dull, quickly forgotten mess.

So what is Reflections doing to ensure that *DRIV3R*, as Atari likes to call the new sequel, doesn't fall into the same pit of mediocrity? On the surface, the game seems distressingly similar. You reprise your role as undercover officer Tanner, who is investigating a crime boss who just ordered 40 pristine exotics from a car-theft ring. You move the story along by completing a series of sequential missions, most of which involve reckless driving, vehicular manslaughter, first-degree murder, or all three at once. An external "take a ride" mode lets you tootle around *DRIV3R*'s three cities (Istanbul, Miami, and Nice) at any hour of the day you'd like. Nothing terribly new here, really.

Upon closer inspection, though, you start to notice the big difference from *Driver 2*: All the details are done *right* this time. The level of detail in the early PS2 and Xbox versions we played was unlike anything seen before in console car-chase-dom. The autos, motorcycles, and boats you work with in *DRIV3R* look impeccable, and the sort of damage you can inflict on them is amazing. Not only can you plug an SUV full of holes *Bonne & Clyde* style, but with an aptly placed grenade, you can literally blow your ride to pieces, sending bits of blackened chassis

← Like any sensible GTA-ish game, DRIV3R becomes more engaging the less rationally you drive. The mayhem's turned up a notch here thanks to Reflections' scarily realistic physics system and a multitude of new rides. Have you ever wondered whether it was safe to pull a stoppy on a Kawasaki Ninja clone while doing 80 mph on a Miami freeway? Now you can try it!

WAREHOUSE ROCK

DRIV3R is Atari's big game of early 2004, and it's sparing no expense on promotion. The publisher held an enormous bash in a San Francisco warehouse earlier this winter to reveal the game and the series of short films that goes with it (watch 'em right now at www.driv3r.com). Atari also gave us a chance to meet Michael Madsen and Michelle Rodriguez, who both did voice work for the game. Why did they sign on? As Madsen put it, after bit parts in GTA: Vice City and True Crime, "I wanted to be the hero. I didn't want to be the guy getting thrown out the window." Who would, eh? ■←

flying in all directions. This sense of detail extends to the city layouts, which outdo GTA's clones both in looks and design sense—Istanbul is grubby and filled with slums, while Nice is the sort of quaint resort town your grandmother holidays in during the summer.

To this visual splendor, Reflections has added some solid gameplay enhancements, design lessons hard earned from Driver 2 and Stuntman (which producer Martin Edmondson admits was "just too hard"). Tanner

can run around and carjack vehicles without a care in the world, just like in GTA. He also needs to run in and out of buildings to complete many missions, but the game switches to a first-person view by default while indoors, avoiding the camera issues seen in Sony's The Getaway. Also gone is Driver 2's laughably slow framerate—everything ran smoothly during our test run, a surprise considering the level of detail Reflections managed to achieve on the PlayStation 2 version.

By the time you read this, DRIV3R will be almost complete—according to Edmondson, the remaining work lies in mission tuning and other tiny bits of polish. The game has obviously faced its share of delays (its original deadline was a year and a half ago), but its final release could prove that yes, you can teach an old wheelman new tricks. ■←

GMR SAYS → GTA and The Getaway had a kid who inherited all the good genes.

→ HOW HOT... ◆◆◆◆

RELEASE | MARCH

HITMAN: CONTRACTS
I AM THE EGGMAN

System **PS2/XB** Publisher **EIDOS** Developer **IO INTERACTIVE**

← Agent 47 is the caring type. So caring, in fact, that he laid this security guard down as gently as possible, so as not to bang his head on the linoleum. Not that it really mattered, since the guard was, you know, dead and all.

Last month, *GMR* **brought word of the newest installment in the** *Hitman* **series. In case you missed it, here's a quick refresher of what you can expect to find in** *Contracts***: improvisational weaponry, a new graphics engine, a darker story, and Agent 47 enduring some pretty nasty head games. In the roughly 30 days that have transpired since, we've had the chance to see the game in action.**

As the story goes, Agent 47 has been seriously wounded and awakes to find himself in a Paris hotel. On the mend,

he has a chance to reminisce about jobs gone by, which of course means that *Contracts'* story is told primarily through flashbacks. The first of these begins in the sanitarium, where the original *Hitman* concluded—only it's not exactly how you might remember it...it's how the heavily medicated Agent 47 remembers it. See? Head games. As the story unfolds, events and environments become even more surreal (e.g., people in pig masks making out in a meat freezer, which, you know, is weird for most people).

We also got to see 47's improv skills in action. Tasked with taking out the Meat King, 47 slips into his kingdom (i.e., the slaughterhouse) undetected, liberates a chef from his outfit, and carts a meal up to the swank penthouse floor. Unbeknownst to his royal highness, tonight's special is roast chicken served with a side of pipin'-hot crowbar. Another early favorite has 47 pouring laxatives in some soup and then waiting for it to be served and eaten before he encounters his prey in the bathroom and delivers him a most

undignified end. Of course, each of the 12 missions can be accomplished in multiple ways.

Eidos claims *Contracts* will be ready in the spring, but the game seems a little early for that timetable—we wouldn't be too surprised if it were pushed back a couple more months. And if we're wrong, well, you can put some Ex-Lax in our lunch.

GMR SAYS → Buy stock in shaving cream if you know what's good for you.

→ HOW HOT... ♦ ♦ ♦

GMR PRESENTS

RESIDENT EVIL
OUTBREAK

BE ONE OF THE FIRST 10 PEOPLE TO **WIN THIS GAME.**

LOG ON TO REOUTBREAK.GMRMAGAZINE.COM AND ENTER YOUR NAME TO WIN*

EACH WINNER WILL RECEIVE A SIGNED COPY OF RESIDENT EVIL® OUTBREAK FOR
PLAYSTATION®2 COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM, STRATEGY GUIDE FROM BRADY GAMES,
RESIDENT EVIL® OUTBREAK POSTER AND TRADING CARDS, AND AN OFFICIAL CAPCOM T-SHIRT.

*MUST BE 17 OR OLDER TO ENTER. SEE WEBSITE FOR FULL CONTEST RULES, TERMS AND CONDITIONS.

RELEASE | APRIL

LINEAGE II

IT'S IN THE BLOOD

□ SYSTEM PC □ PUBLISHER NCSOFT
□ DEVELOPER NCSOFT

NCsoft's *Lineage* **franchise, which is practically a national pastime in its native Korea, hasn't quite caught on over here just yet.** *Lineage II* aims to change that, with plenty of slick-looking 3D fantasy environments, a branching character-development system, and a combat engine rooted in player-versus-player siege warfare.

Player clans compete to establish dominance through control of heavily armored castles and fortresses, giving them power over the local economy and the ability to forge alliances with other clans. You can also raise your very own pet dragon, all the way from cuddly hatchling to gargantuan wyvern of flaming death. Rock. ■←

GMA SAYS → It's about time we had a pretty MMO that caters to the PVP crowd.
→ HOW HOT... ●●●●
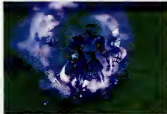
SPLINTER CELL: PAND

THE GHOST IN YOU. SHE DON'T FADE...

□ SYSTEM XB □ PUBLISHER UBISOFT □ DEVELOPER UBISOFT SHANGHAI

Odds are, secret agent man Sam Fisher won't live to see tomorrow, let alone the mysterious *Pandora Tomorrow.* **Doomed though he may be, Fisher returns and will certainly give the no-goodniks what for in his second 3D third-person adventure,** *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow.*

Fisher remains the king of shadows, working in secret to promote good American democracy by shooting bad guys in the face, knocking them insensate, or employing explosive technology to ensure that, once eliminated, they will need to be sucked up by a

vacuum. Grizzled actor Michael Ironside IV, *Starship Troopers*) returns to voice the character, and his gravelly, stern delivery helps cement Fisher's rep as an unrepentant badass.

Pandora Tomorrow begins with a hostage situation. The third-world cesspool East Timor explodes in violence, as third-world cesspools are wont to do. Colonel Irving Lambert quickly sends Fisher his orders: Infiltrate the U.S. Embassy. Kill no one. Raise no alarms. As our hero winds his way through a ramshackle village, players are given a crash course in staying alive:

crouch and move slowly, stay in the shadows, use night vision to see in the darkness and thermal vision to check for warm bodies and red-hot mines. A special meter tells players how dark Fisher's current location is and also tracks the level of noise. This meter, more than any gun or tool, is the greatest weapon of all.

An unfinished warts-and-all version of *Pandora Tomorrow* served as a painful reminder that it's not easy being a ghost. One stage features Fisher storming a semi-abandoned railroad, sneaking through an unused car while nearby trains roll past, casting lights all around and
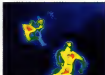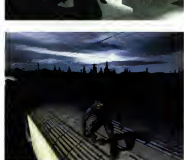
RELEASE | MARCH

ORA TOMORROW

← The single-player game is full of the usual shadow-bound tension that hallmarked the first game, but now that you can take your creepy creeping skills in the public arena against live opponents, it's a whole new game. Are you more than merely the king of your living room?

IT'S GOOD TO KILL TOGETHER

Multiplayer options in *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow* pit four players in a war between mercenaries and spies. The mercenaries play their games in the first-person perspective, and the spies play in the third. The goals for each side are simple: spies steal items or sabotage them, mercenaries seek to kill the spies. Spies are given nonlethal weaponry but are lightning quick and can climb into ducts and such, which the mercenaries can't reach. Naturally, chaos ensues, and though the sides were not yet properly balanced (spies seemed able to move too quickly to avoid death by lead), a series of LAN-based matches hint at multiplayer being *Tomorrow's* delicious icing. 🔶

eliminating many prime hiding spots. Three guards need to be defeated here, and considering their Ginsu-sharp A.I., survival—let alone remaining undetected—seems an almost Herculean task. Yves Guillemot, Ubisoft president, proclaims *Pandora Tomorrow* will contain "ambient A.I." to make its gaming experience more intense. Guillemot recently told the BBC this A.I. will adjust the difficulty level for players, making the game harder or easier. In addition, it will influence some of the game's scripting, meaning that certain events may occur at varying times, depending on

their impact. Sadly, Guillemot gave no specific examples.

No matter. *Pandora Tomorrow*, even incomplete, offers a taut, frantic, and sometimes kill-or-die-trying experience. Optic cables can be slid under doors to get a view of what's on the other side, but knowing where an enemy is proves to be only half the battle. Bathed in darkness and watching the world through the muted-gray view of night-vision goggles, Fisher will often find himself mere feet away from an enemy staring (seemingly) straight at him—and despite what Elvis said, a strong heart and nerves

of steel are not all you need. To unravel the mystery of *Pandora Tomorrow*, Fisher will need luck and skill aplenty, as well as a sound knowledge of how to creep, crawl, and slink in the shadows. 🔶

GMR SAYS → You sneaky bastard!

→ HOW HOT... ◆◆◆◆

you UFO "Trinidade" approaching)

XB

PS2
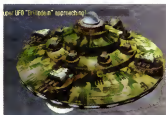
RELEASE | MARCH

NAVAL OPS: COMMANDER
PLAY WITH BOATS

SYSTEM PS2 PUBLISHER KOEI
DEVELOPER MICROCABIN

Koei's back—already—with a follow-up to its action-heavy *Naval Ops* series, a refreshing alternative to its excellent but more simulation-focused *Pacific Theater of Operations* line of games.

In the *Naval Ops* universe, you are not restricted to the sheer onslaught of planning and execution. Nay. Instead, you are required to command and hurl your fleet (called a tactical battle group) into action, instructing escorts to provide antiaircraft, antiship, and assault support. Enhancing your ships with all the latest armaments, both fictional and realistic, is also encouraged—to the tune of more than 1,000 parts and pieces. 🔶

GMR SAYS → Playing with boats on television is better than playing with them in the bathtub.

→ HOW HOT... ◆◆◆

RELEASE | FALL

THE MOVIES
WARM UP THE CASTING COUCH

⬡ SYSTEM PC/PS2/XB/GC   ⬡ PUBLISHER ACTIVISION   ⬡ DEVELOPER LIONHEAD STUDIOS

Lionhead's next game has a summer-blockbuster–sized goal—it aims to give you total control of a movie studio from 1900 all the way to 2010. When we say total control, we mean everything from studio layout to the production of individual movies.

The Movies focuses on the studio, the stars, and the movies. The studio portion is like any building-management sim: First you research new technologies (sound studios, digital-film equipment), then you purchase facilities such as movie sets, trailers, etc. Managing the stars is a bit like managing a Sim—you find promising talent and help them develop their acting career over the years.

But the most interesting feature is the moviemaking. After selecting a script and stars, you place the stars in sets and then select a scene from a menu of about 3,000. While the scene is being filmed, you can tweak settings, like the extent of sensuality in a romance scene or gore in a horror scene. You keep on adding scenes until you have a full movie. You can write subtitles, dub your own voiceovers into the movie, create a preview trailer, and even upload the entire movie online for other Movies players to watch. ◄

GMR SAYS ► If Lionhead can pull it off, this is the perfect game for all you film-school dropouts.

→ HOW HOT...   ♦♦♦
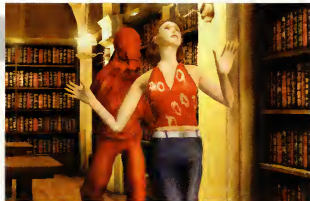
RELEASE | FALL

RED NINJA: END OF HONOR
NINJA ACTION FOR A WIRED GENERATION

⬡ SYSTEM PS2/XB   ⬡ PUBLISHER VIVENDI UNIVERSAL   ⬡ DEVELOPER TRANJI

A ninja game based on what sounds like the plot of Clint Eastwood's Hang 'Em High—if nothing else, Red Ninja gets points for being different. Given how much classic Westerns borrowed from the Japanese, though, it's only fair to see the trend shift the other way.

Red Ninja goes one step further, making its backstory the source of its key gameplay element. The heroine, Kurenai ("red" in Japanese, ha ha), is hanged from a wire and left for dead by the Black Lizard clan that becomes her nemesis. That wire, in turn, becomes her signature tool and weapon for her mission of revenge.

Although the game also gives Kurenai many familiar ninja subweapons—blow darts, smoke grenades, bombs—along with the de rigueur ninja magic, the wire is Red Ninja's

centerpiece. Combining special attachments and different lengths creates a cross between Castlevania's whip and Bionic Commando's robot arm, with specialized versions for combat, platforming, and sneaking through the shadows.

Developer Tranji has a somewhat spotty history—with former members of developer Opus, maker of some of Japan's weakest exports in recent years—but there are some encouraging contributions involved as well. Vivendi's signed up writer/director Shinsuke Sato (Princess Blade) to handle the cinematic end of things. ◄

GMR SAYS ► There are definitely some good ideas here, but given the example of Opus' UFC games and Wave Rally, we'll need to see a bit more before we're convinced

→ HOW HOT...   ♦♦

MEGA MAN MANIA

⬡ SYSTEM GBA   ⬡ PUBLISHER CAPCOM   ⬡ DEVELOPER CAPCOM

As if 10 games in the Mega Man Anniversary Collection weren't enough to test all your Capcom has another retro pack hot on its heels. Mega Man Mania comes in a handy travel size, though, with all five Game Boy Mega Man title-scrollers on a single GBA cartridge. The original versions are long out of print—so no more eBay gouging—and Capcom's also packed in artwork and historical extras. Mega Man Mania ship this May.

→ HOW HOT...   ♦♦♦

>> NEXT

RELEASE | FALL

SILENT HILL 4: THE ROOM
THE WALLS...THE WALLS ARE BREATHING...

○ SYSTEM PS2/XB   ○ PUBLISHER KONAMI   ○ DEVELOPER KCET

XB

PS2

← *Silent Hill* never quite shies away from the gross-out, does it? *The Room* is no exception, as evidenced by these gory scenes. With a stronger focus on combat this time around, let's hope the dev team decides to implement user-friendly camera angles and more responsive controls.
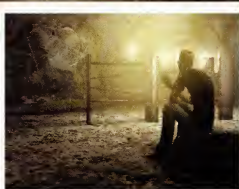
When we were kids, we were afraid of a monster that lived in the closet. In *Silent Hill 4*, the monster is the closet...plus the living room, the kitchen, the shower, and all the rest of your apartment. And it won't let you leave—not until you see what it wants to show you, anyway.

You, in this context, are Henry Townshend, a man who wakes up to find himself trapped in what was once his humble home. Any way to the outside world is shut, replaced by portals into a series of strange

alternate dimensions. It's an interesting twist on the usual *Silent Hill* setup in which the protagonist descends into a supernatural world. In *Silent Hill 4*, the supernatural comes to meet him.

Although *Silent Hill 4* comes from the same people who made *Silent Hill 3* (and they say it will be much more like *Silent Hill 3* than *Silent Hill 2*), there are several structural changes. The use of the apartment as a sort of hub level gives the level designers much more freedom to create original worlds—there's no need for a smooth

transition between areas. Those worlds are shown from different perspectives. Even though *Silent Hill 4* defaults to the usual third-person view, some areas are shown through Henry's eyes, offering a close-up view of the new game's catalog of horrors.

Exactly how and why Henry's home has decided to consume him is, of course, a closely guarded secret. After *Silent Hill 3* provided so much closure to the events of the first *Silent Hill*, it seems as if *Silent Hill 4* may be striking out on its own with a more original story.

Regardless of whether there's any plot continuity between this and other games, though, there's certainly a continuity of style. Team Silent has, as always, an almost Clive Barkerian flair for the appalling and the technical talent to make sure that the frightful has never looked this beautiful. ◄

GMR SAYS → *Silent Hill* hasn't struck out yet, and with the same talent working on a fresh new concept, it can't help but be a perfectly horrible experience.

→ HOW HOT... ◆ ◆ ◆

65

RELEASE | MARCH

SYPHON FILTER: THE OMEGA STRAIN

DOCTOR. DOCTOR. GIVE ME THE NEWS...

□ SYSTEM PS2   □ PUBLISHER SCEA   □ DEVELOPER SONY BEND

Launch override switch.

○ Interact

Bonus - shoot all targets in under 45 seconds

← Sharpen your shooting and targeting skills on the range so that you're ready for when the bad guys come a-callin'. Or don't. It's up to you. Thank goodness for democracy!

Shoot the targets

□ Attack   4   20/72

The Syphon Filter virus will find a new host in PlayStation 2 when *The Omega Strain* hits this spring. The fourth game in the *Syphon Filter* series returns hardened warrior Gabe Logan to videogame action and arrives bearing online play for up to four germ warriors.

In *Syphon Filter: The Omega Strain*, players assume the role of an operative working for Logan's reformed black-box Agency, taking part in assignments spanning the globe in *Omega Strain* hot spots such as Yemen and Tokyo. The game lets players choose their agent's uniform and appearance, as well as his or her equipment.

Sony proclaims each of *Omega Strain's* 17 worlds will be up to three times larger than the environments held in previous *Syphon Filter* outings. The series' basic run-and-gun, third-person-shooter gameplay remains unchanged, but the addition of online play greatly expands this title. Nine of the 17 missions can be played with friends online, and cooperative play will enable the agents to combine their efforts to reach new gameplay areas, which hold new challenges and cool weapon upgrades. Online, the game will support the use of the *SOCOM* or USB headsets so that players can chat with each other during the action. Players without the headsets in online play aren't SOL, since they can issue simple commands to their cohorts with the PS2 controller's directional pad.

The *Syphon Filter* games have all been about intrigue and good, old-fashioned violence. *Omega Strain* holds true to the canon. The developers promise more than 100 different weapons and tools for agents to use, and each player can hold four weapons at one time. Although the emphasis will clearly be on blasting terrorists, other styles of gameplay will also be emphasized. ◄

GMA SAYS → Can *Syphon Filter's* first excursion to PlayStation 2 hang with the big boys of this stealth generation? We'll soon find out

→ HOW HOT...   ♦ ♦ ♦

PS2

RELEASE | TBD

PHANTOM DUST
PUT THOSE STUPID CARDS AWAY, SISSY

□SYSTEM XB □PUBLISHER MICROSOFT □DEVELOPER MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS

← Each one of those options in the main picture is one of the randomly selected attacks assigned to your Xbox controller's four main buttons. With more than 300 collectible "moves" available, you can expect a wild variety of special effects. Plus, Phantom Dust lets you blow stuff up real good.

XB
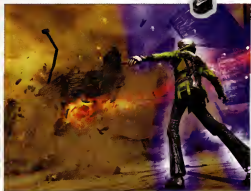
Hybrid genres are nothing new. We have action-RPGs, strategy simulations, and plenty of other designs created by mixing and matching two familiar categories. Phantom Dust is a rarity, though, an almost unique blend of slugfest action and the fundamental tenets of collectible card games.

Phantom Dust isn't literally based on the CCG template, though. It just takes some of the best ideas from the genre's guts and works them into making a fun, replayable action game.

On the surface, Phantom Dust owes a massive debt to Japanese psychic action comics. It's a postapocalyptic world, you have phenomenal psychic powers (you're forced to smash things with them on an almost-hourly basis)—you know the drill. But this isn't just a mindless action game, which is where all those CCG concepts come in.

The game contains 300 different powers, including attack, defense, support, and other categories. Think of those as the "cards." You can't use all

300 at once—you collect them and arrange them into sets of 30. Those are the "decks." When you go to fight in one of many completely destructible environments, you don't choose exactly which powers you have at your fingertips. Those are scattered around the level in a random "draw." Finally, you pick up and use four powers at a time, one for each Xbox controller face button. Those make up your "hand."

Collecting powers and compiling them into specialized decks adds a huge new dimension of strategy,

especially when you factor in four-player Xbox Live combat. With that many powers to mix and match, the variety of decks and approaches to combat is potentially vast. Phantom Dust's developers will obviously have a hell of a time setting up proper game balance, but once that's ready, we'll be in for a completely new challenge online. **##**

GMR SAYS → We haven't heard much since the Tokyo Game Show, but Phantom Dust has as much potential as any Xbox Live game on the horizon.
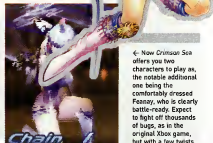
→ HOW HOT... ★★★★

RELEASE | MARCH

CRIMSON SEA 2
THE SEA IS RED WITH BLOOD. OH WAIT, NO IT'S NOT

System PS2 Publisher KOEI Developer KOEI

← Now Crimson Sea offers you two characters to play as, the notable additional one being the comfortably dressed Feanay, who is clearly battle-ready. Expect to fight off thousands of bugs, as in the original Xbox game, but with a few twists.

The original *Crimson Sea* was Koei's first (and last?) Xbox-exclusive release, an intense sci-fi action-adventure with loads of xenomorph-fragging action, a handful of RPG elements, a gorgeous orchestral score, and a fantastic visual style that overcame its weak English localization. Alas, American Xbox owners don't know Koei from a hole in the ground, and Japanese Xbox owners—well, there aren't any Japanese Xbox owners. (Ouch!) Hence, *Crimson Sea* didn't exactly tear up the

sales charts, *Dynasty Warriors* style.

In the hopes of salvaging a would-be franchise, Koei is producing the sequel exclusively for PlayStation 2, hoping it finds a much-deserved audience the second time around. *Crimson Sea 2* is much more than a slightly tweaked port of the Xbox original, however, since Koei has taken the time to improve literally everything about the gameplay (except the graphics and sound, which have been unavoidably downsized for PS2)—no more widescreen goodness or in-

game Dolby Digital).

The original game had a single playable character named Sho; *CS2* gives you a tag-team partner named Feanay, and she's a lady. The original game was for one player only; *CS2* has versus, co-op, and "competition" splitscreen modes for two players. *CS2* also adds some new combat techniques and neo-psionic attacks, including a variation of the accursed bullet-time effect.

The most sweeping changes of all are in the mission structure. The

original game had two dozen missions, which were tackled in linear order; *CS2* has more than 60, and you can explore stages without accepting the related tasks, simply building up your character and weapon stats until you're ready to proceed. Plus, there's more variety in the objectives, which include rescue, infiltration, item collection, and escort. ▮◀

GMR SAYS > If they tidy up the controls, Koei could have another big hit on their hands.

→ HOW HOT... ♦♦♦

TRANSFORMERS ARMADA
DOMO ARIGATO, MR. ROBOTO!

☐system PS2 ☐publisher ATARI ☐developer MELBOURNE HOUSE

← Optimus Prime looks like he's ready for prime time, thanks to the guys at Melbourne House, the versatile coders behind diverse titles like *Test Drive: Le Mans*, *Men In Black* and *Looney Tunes: Space Race*.

Transformers and Atari. Two great tastes that taste great together are now joining forces to bring some major rock 'em, sock 'em robot action to PS2 with *Transformers Armada*. But will this '80s-era Tango-and-Cash–like dream team offer more than meets the eye, or just more robots in disguise?

With its massive locations, butt-kicking weapons, and frenetic action, we think both gamers and *Transformers* fans alike will be very pleased with *Armada*. Just check out the overview: Armchair Autobots select from Optimus Prime, Hot Shot, or Red Alert and then bring some major pain to those pesky Decepticons who are busy taking over the universe with their new Decepticlone army. Bring it on!

But, wait. Did somebody mutter the word "clones"? As in fake sheep or cheesy *Star Wars* title? Yup! But in *Armada*'s case, clones consist of badass Decepticon spider tanks, sentry drones, heavy grunts, and more all working to overthrow the universe with brute force. Think that's tough? The Decepticon big boys are all looking to brawl as well, including Tidal Wave, Starscream, and Megatron. Yikes!

Fortunately for the Autobots, more than 20 types of weaponry—including cluster rockets, homing missiles, sniper rifles, and more—are at bay, as well as the ability to transform between vehicles and robots for greater speed and power, depending on the situation. But with so many baddies to blow up, how can one Autobot make a difference?

Enter the Minicons. As the long-lost third generation of Transformers stranded on Earth (if that uncle no one in your family talks to anymore), the Minicons have the ability to dole out new power-ups to the Autobots, including glide, stealth, tractor-beam abilities, and more. The trick is to find and rescue them amidst the onslaught of Decepticons out there. ◄
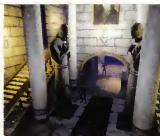
GMR SAYS → If *Armada* sells can we get that *Voltron* game made?

→ HOW HOT... ✦✦✦✦✦

RELEASE | SPRING

THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS

SUNNY SIDE UP

SYSTEM   XB, PC   PUBLISHER   EIDOS INTERACTIVE   DEVELOPER   ION STORM

← We pity the fool that takes a knife to the throat, which is why we play this game with our eyes closed. We're chicken like that. Now you can stab people in third-person. That's very considerate.

The third game in the kingpin of stealth-game series on PC and Xbox, *Thief*, is slinking its way to both PC and Xbox. Veterans of the previous two games know that *Thief* is all about the sneaking and the robbing. *Thief: Deadly Shadows* promises more of the same. Ion Storm wouldn't comment on the plot, but we do know it involves master thief Garrett (again), some forces of darkness, and much stealing from rich people.

Since Garrett isn't much of a fighter, he still has an arsenal of arrows and tools (such as flash bombs) designed to either incapacitate guards or cover his tracks to avoid detection in the first place. Sure, he's got a dagger to fight 1-on-1, but he's better off just cracking the back of someone's head with a blackjack.

The most surprising addition to the *Thief* franchise? A third-person mode. The previous two games were strictly first person, but now players have the option to switch to a new third-person setting. You can easily change your perspective on the fly or just stick to one and play the entire game that way. With the new third-person option, you can actually see Garrett do his slick leaps, stealthy climbs, and guard blackjacking. You still have the handy visibility gem that dims when you're hidden and lights up when you're visible.

Other additions include dynamic shadows (Garrett can fuss with the lighting to create shadows that are advantageous for hiding), ruthless A.I. that will call for help and investigate suspicious places, and a wider variety of mission types (including stealing, sabotaging, assassinating, and even setting up ambushes). All of this uses the same engine that powers *Deus Ex Invisible War*, so besides playing well, it'll look snazzy, too. We hope the effort to make *Thief* more console and newbie friendly (cough, *Deus Ex*, cough) doesn't involve dumbing it down, though. ▶◀

GMR SAYS → Looks and sneaks good—we'll have to see if the kingpin of PC stealth games stays a kingpin once it enters the stealth-filled console arena

→ HOW HOT...   ♦♦♦

RELEASE | SUMMER

SHELLSHOCK: NAM '67
BECAUSE WAR IS HELL

SYSTEM PS2 ▫ PUBLISHER EIDOS ▫ DEVELOPER GUERRILLA GAMES

Eidos developer Guerrilla Games has apparently had enough of the industry portraying war as a glorious way to die. It's working on a new first-person shooter set in Vietnam that pulls no punches about the conflict. Players start as a rookie soldier in Indochina and are quickly thrown into the oppressive heat of the jungle. What makes *ShellShock* different from the usual first-person shooter is its unnerving sense of realism. Friendly fire proves to be almost as lethal as enemy fire, especially when the A.I. is modeled after rookies on their first tour. As players wade through waterlogged rice paddies, dense vegetation, and flowing streams, they realize that every tree, shrub, and boulder potentially hides a member of the North Vietnamese army who is aiming a rifle straight at them.

Eidos promises the game will be graphic. Soldiers don't simply live or die, they go down wounded and bleeding but continue to fight until they simply can't. Because the developers want the game to be historically accurate, players will encounter armed women, fatal booby traps, and the intricate tunnel system that made defeating the Viet Cong impossible. Battles range from all-out combat (including air strikes) to assassinations conducted in the dead of night. *ShellShock* sounds promising, although we're not quite certain we're looking forward to it. ■◆
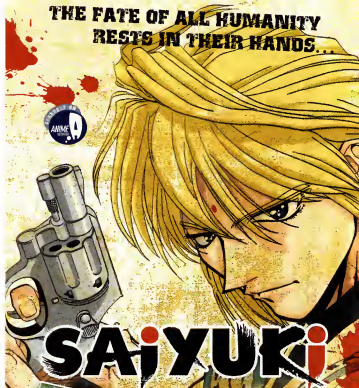
GMR SAYS → Could this be the Saving Private Ryan of the game industry?

→ HOW HOT... ●●●

FABLE

IT'S TIME TO BREAK OUT YOUR RENAISSANCE FAIRE PASSES

SYSTEM XB   PUBLISHER MICROSOFT   DEVELOPER BLUE BOX/LIONHEAD

"I love deadlines," the late Douglas Adams once said, "especially the whooshing sound they make as they go flying by." No game currently in development (besides *Duke Nukem Forever*) reminds us of this quote more than *Fable*, the mind-bogglingly ambitious RPG with an equally mind-boggling trail of broken release dates strewn behind it.

Peter Molyneux, the game-design visionary overseeing the project, freely admits that creating what he says will be "the greatest role-playing game of all time" hasn't been a walk in the park. "Without a doubt, the most time-consuming part has been the story, with all its quests, vignettes, and twists," he says. "It's been especially tough weaving the ability to be whoever you want to be into the story, as we wanted the story line to be as compelling as anything you'd see on film."

What is this story he's talking about? That's up to you, actually. *Fable* begins with a young boy separated from his family by dark brigands, ends with one of several possible conclusions a few in-game decades later, and the bit in between is what you get to make up. In that respect, the game is similar to other open-ended RPGs such as *Morrowind* and *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*, but even those titles had overreaching stories that players were ultimately sucked in to like whirlpools. This one doesn't—you can build yourself into a wholesome paladin as you look for your parents, or you can drop the

"revenge" malarkey, scamper into the woods, and become the toughest, smelliest villain in all of Albion.

This is where the complexity of *Fable* shines through. The development team at Big Blue Box, headed up by Simon and Dene Carter, have to prepare in-game reactions for everything the player might try to do, from starting pub brawls to ambushing your own friends. One solution they came up with: All the characters in the game have their own opinion of you (based on rumors

>>NEXT

← Will you be a sinister freak who kicks puppies, or a benevolent Good Samaritan who helps old ladies cross the road? We here at GMR will choose the path of evil.

XB

and their own experiences) and will react accordingly when you're near, welcoming you with open arms or running off screaming. "It's incredibly empowering to wander into a town, point a bow at someone, hear him plead for his life, and see how he remembers it the next time you see him," comments Simon.

The RPG experimentation doesn't end with the story, however. For one, there's the battle system, one of the most open-ended ones in all of console-dom. Every character in Fable starts the same, but after a few hours, each one will change based on your actions—whether you prefer melee combat, ranged weapons, or magic. You learn new moves from downed enemies, and once you have a decent repertoire, you can unleash them in a real-time setup that Molyneux compares to those in Soul Calibur and other fighters. There's also a multiplayer mode, similar to Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles' but a bit more competitive: Players start out as "alter egos" of the main character and must compete to become the hero by bashing up enemies and earning experience.

So when will you get to enjoy all this innovation? Microsoft's current estimate is this fall, and judging from recent comments from the Carters, it looks like this date could actually stick. For Xbox freaks in need of another 100-hour escape from reality, Fable will be worth the wait. ■←

GMR SAYS → Dig the new breed of RPG

→ HOW HOT... 🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥

RELEASE | **MAY**

RALLISPORT CHALLENGE 2
OFF-ROAD + ONLINE = OH, YEAH!

☐SYSTEM XB ☐PUBLISHER MICROSOFT ☐DEVELOPER DIGITAL ILLUSIONS CE

← We're such fans of screenshots taken from completely nonplayable angles that we decided to run a few. Ah, the golden sunsets make us want to crack open a cold one. Life is grand only when you make it so.

Buckle up, speed freaks. It's time to hit the mud face-first with Microsoft's premier online rally romp, *RalliSport Challenge 2*. Following the lead of the original smash, *RalliSport Challenge*, *RSC2* promises to pack an even bigger punch this time around with overhauled graphics, a bevy of racing modes, spankin' new cars and tracks, and most important (drum roll, please), the introduction of online play through Xbox Live.

That's right. No more squeezing onto that broken-down couch just to race your buddies. Thanks to XSNsports.com, rally fans can now set up tournaments and leagues on their own, then fire up their respective rides and go neck and neck with their rivals online. Still need a *RalliSport* fix but stuck at work? Just hop online from virtually any PC out there and track live up-to-date stats on the fly.

So just what can rally fans look forward to, both on- and offline? For starters, tons of locations. Whether smashing through Sweden or finishing first in Monte Carlo, *RSC2*'s 90 tracks (nearly double the number in the original) mix it up with plenty of variety. Toss in the slew of in-game racing modes, including career, multiplayer, ice racing, and crossover duel, and *RSC2* is sure to pack lots of bang for the buck.

Those looking to put the "car" in "carnage" will salivate over the numerous paint scratches, giant dents, and flying debris that can "hooptify" *RSC2*'s 40 cars (including the Ford GT70, the Lancia Stratos, and the notorious "Group B" cars, once considered too extreme for rally races) within minutes. And gearheads can even fine-tune their vehicles to better accommodate track conditions.

How about breakable objects, mudholes, and ice? Check. Realistic sound effects and physics? Check. Look for more this spring when we review *RSC2* and purchase some much-needed virtual auto insurance. ‖◄
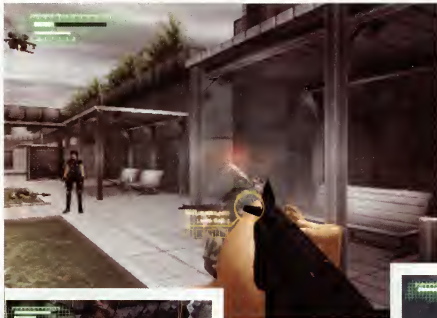
GMR SAYS → We think fans will rally around this sequel.

→ HOW HOT... ●●●●

RELEASE | **MARCH**

BREAKDOWN
WHY DOES THIS WOMAN KEEP PICKING ME UP?

○ SYSTEM **XB**   ○ PUBLISHER **NAMCO**   ○ DEVELOPER **NAMCO**

XB

→ Alex is your only link to reality in this amnesia-riddled first-person adventure. She protects you with her life. Who is she, what does she mean to you, and why is she helping you? Only time will tell.

GMR SAYS → Punch the future. Punch it hard for it is in first-person.

Breakdown is a first-person shooter with a gimmick (previously seen in the underrated *Arx Fatalis*) taken to an entirely new level: You can see the limbs of the game's protagonist. The most you glimpse of the typical FPS hero is his right hand lovingly clutching whatever weapon you're using to frag your foes, but the appendages of our hero, an amnesiac named Derrick Cole, are omnipresent.

In the game's opening scene, when a lovely lass named Alex helps the woozy Derrick crawl out of bed, you watch Derrick's hand reach out for hers. You then watch Derrick's arms drape around her neck as she escorts him to a nearby toilet, for what is almost certainly the first rendition of vomiting in an FPS.

Oh, but it gets better. When Derrick searches fallen foes, his hand frisks the corpses for useful items. When Derrick rifles through weapons, he removes the ammo clips and tosses the surplus firearms, since he can carry only one of each type. When Derrick scurries through crawl spaces,

you see his arms pulling him forward. It's very cool and very immersive stuff.

While we can't reveal much about the story line—our preview version came with a list of no less than nine taboo topics and a reminder that Namco knows where we live—we can tell you that hallucinations play a central role in the narrative. These purple-hazy moments not only allow for groovy visual effects—such as a harrowing moment in which Derrick's flesh literally melts off his bones—but also awaken some of Derrick's, uh, other talents.

Unlike most first-person shooters, *Breakdown* includes hand-to-hand combat, no doubt to show off its lovely limbs; you can execute several attacks, block incoming fists, and even pull off simple combos. *Breakdown* isn't a game in which you clear out room after room with a BFG; Derrick is much more often the hunted than the hunter, fighting only when he has no other choice. ▮◙

→ HOW HOT...   ✦✦✦

GALLERY

FINAL FANTASY VII: ADVENT

THIS ISN'T A GAME ANYMORE

Scheduled to be released later this fall/winter, *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children* takes place after the conclusion of *Final Fantasy VII*. What we do know now is that Cloud Strife, as well as old pals like Barrett, returns. Is it a movie? Is it a game? Current info leans toward it being the former, with a running time of under an hour (this ain't no *The Spirits Within*—see Retro/Active), but we'll learn more at this year's E3.
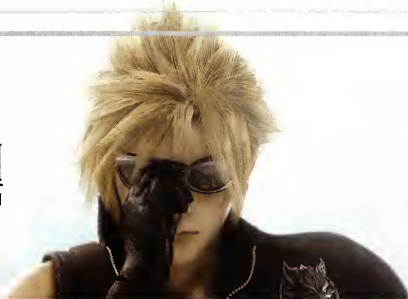
← Old friend Barrett shows up to give some punks a piece of his mind...and his metal rocket-fist. As evidenced by the screenshot below, it looks as if the Shin-Ra Corporation has seen better days. What exactly has happened in the time between *FFVII* and *FFVII: Advent Children*? While details are scarce, we expect Square to start clearing things up this May.

CHILDREN

FINAL FANTASY.VII
ADVENT CHILDREN

→ Gone are the superdeformed thimble-sized heroes of an era gone by. Cloud Strife is all grown up and looking like a Los Angeles glam rocker. In fact, nearly everyone in these pics looks like a stunt double for the Stone Temple Pilots. That is, if the Stone Temple Pilots did stunts, and, uh, shot lasers.

NOW

While you were reading the first part of the magazine, we sneaked into your house, went through your drawers, planted a camera in your bathroom, and blew up your garage with C4—*and you never knew we were there.* Sorry 'bout that, we're just easily influenced by the excellent spy/stealth games we played this month. Maybe Sen. Lieberman was right....

✕ HOW WE RATE

WARNING! WHERE MULTIPLE VERSIONS OF A GAME ARE REVIEWED, GMR WILL MENTION DIFFERENCES ONLY IF THEY SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECT THE GAMEPLAY

YOUR GUIDE TO THE GMR SCORING SYSTEM

| 1 AWFULNESS | 2 DASTARDLY | 3 PITIFUL | 4 OOPS | 5 AVERAGE | 6 GOOD STUFF | 7 RECOMMENDED | 8 EXCELLENT | 9 TOTALLY SICK | 10 TIMELESS CLASSIC |

REVIEWED THIS ISSUE:

GMR
ESSENTIAL
SELECTION

GC

METAL GEAR SOLID: THE TWIN SNAKES

LOVE STILL BLOOMS ON THE BATTLEFIELD

MATURE | GC

PUBLISHER KONAMI
DEVELOPER SILICON KNIGHTS/KCEJ
PRICE $49.99
RELEASE MARCH
PLAYERS 1
ORIGIN CANADA/JAPAN

In these turbulent times of global terrorist organizations, alarmingly vague homeland-security warnings, politicians practicing questionable politics, and giant walking battle tanks that patrol the majority of the Earth's population centers, armed with rail guns and undetectable nuclear warheads, Hideo Kojima's *Metal Gear Solid* remains a sobering reminder of how the world has gone wrong: government policy influenced by the military-industrial complex and levitating S&M psychics who know—without you even telling them—that you enjoy playing certain videogames.

Clearly, *Metal Gear Solid* straddles the line between fantasy and reality; it was this careful balance of the socially relevant and the delightfully absurd that led us to fall in love back in the fall of 1998. Now, thanks to the efforts of superfriends Konami, Silicon Knights, and Nintendo, the old flame has been reignited by *The Twin Snakes*—a remake that, despite introducing some of its own new problems, successfully captures the look, feel, and spirit of the original *Metal Gear Solid*. Canadian development outfit and Nintendo second party Silicon Knights, led by self-professed *MGS* evangelist Denis Dyack, worked closely with Kojima's Japanese studio on the project. Frequent transpacific crossings were

made during the effort, with Silicon Knights even hosting a few members of the KCEJ team for months. It was this collaborative effort that preserved the basic mechanics of *MGS*: intuitive and responsive control, dynamic and open-ended problem solving, and balanced pacing of the plot and the action.

Even though it's nearly six years old, *Metal Gear Solid* still holds up to present design standards. What Silicon Knights did to make it better—what it added to make an old game worth buying and playing again—unfortunately introduces a hit-or-miss element. Constrained by the inability to significantly change the gameplay structure and level design of *MGS*, each
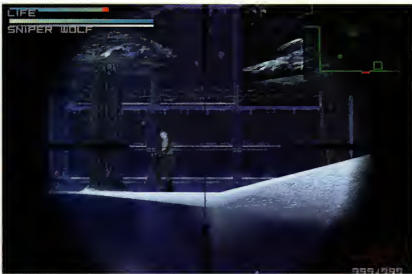
← One of the best things about the original *Metal Gear Solid* was the cinematic cut-scenes that moved the story along (OK, so if you were one of those who hated the long-winded preaching about living life to the fullest and how nuclear weapons are very, very bad, perhaps they were among the worst aspects). As part of the renovations, *Twin Snakes* features newly created cut-scenes that were directed and choreographed by Ryuhei Kitamura, director of the highly entertaining film *Versus*. The two bodies of work share many similarities.

new addition brings with it an influential downside. The A.I. of the genome soldiers has been drastically improved—they're able to hear and see you much better, even from above and below. If Snake is detected, they'll coordinate their searches and look in every room—and when it comes to looking under nondescript orange boxes, they're total jerks. But now they're so tough that when you're actually discovered and the alarm goes off, it's nigh impossible to safely get away. This forces the player to be extra careful, but it's a little too unforgiving.

When you're not on the run, though, the game is actually made easier by the addition of a first-person shooting viewpoint—this is especially evident during the boss battles. The ability to look directly at the target reduces the first fight with Revolver Ocelot to, if you'll pardon, shooting fish in a barrel. Still, the boss battles seem easier even without the addition of a first-person viewpoint. Take for example the final battle with Liquid Snake and Metal Gear Rex—in the original finale, Rex's missiles were much tougher to avoid, as was his electron beam. Not so much in *Twin Snakes*: Missiles can be easily dodged, and the beam doesn't even make it into range before Snake can deliver the final Stinger blow.

Due to the unique circumstances, these problems appear to be

unavoidable without dramatically changing the foundations of the source material. Yet at the same time, they change the experience of *MGS* enough to make it worthwhile. When the final credits roll and the ultimate twist is revealed at the end, *The Twin Snakes* is still the best version of *Metal Gear Solid* available. Unfortunately, it just misses being the best version possible. ◄◄
_Andrew Pfister

2ND OPINION

This is a dream project no one could have foreseen coming. To be able to relive the original *Solid* result with 100% more machismo is nothing short of rootin' tootin'. It's tough though, kind of like when *Capcom* remade *Resident Evil*. But that's exactly what this remake required. ◄◄
_James Mielke

LIFELINE
SHOOT! DODGE! RELORD! #*$%#*!

MATURE | PS2

→ If it wasn't for the gimmick of controlling main character, Rio, with voice-control technology, Lifeline would be a mediocre action-adventure title. But with this addition, it becomes an interesting attempt at innovation in the genre. Unfortunately, it's also a frustrating, throw-down-your-headset, curse-generating one.

The game's setup is pretty predictable. Aliens attack a futuristic space hotel, and you've got to stop them. But you're trapped in the security control room, so you must communicate via voice (using a USB headset) with a surviving hotel employee, Rio, and guide her to defeat the deadly attackers, which range from slimy leeches to giant caterpillars.

While much of the time Rio responds realistically if you use one of the proper commands, other times she can be idiotically oblivious. You must be sure to call everything by its precise name, or you'll be barking orders uselessly for a long, long time.

The technique becomes most artificial (and frustrating) during battles. Rio can't figure out how to dodge and shoot a gun unless she hears it from you. It's sort of like the old parlor game Blind Man's Bluff, but with deadly consequences. You'll be itching to yank that gun from her hands in no time. Remaining calm is a plus.

Still, twitch gamers looking for a new challenge will want to check this out, if only for the sheer novelty of it. It's an interesting twist on game control, and the story has a few good twists of its own. I◄

_Carrie Shepherd

	KONAMI			XX PP
	KONAMI		PLAYERS 1	
	MARCH			JAPAN

GMR 6/10

BETTER THAN TALKING TO MYSELF
NOT AS GOOD AS SEAMAN
WAIT FOR IT THOUGHT-CONTROLLED GAMING

PS2

GC

HARVEST MOON:
A WONDERFUL LIFE
BRING ON THE ANTI-HALO

EVERYONE | GC

→ Without guns, explosions, or car chases, Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life stands out for its placidity. In contrast to the often frenzied pace of everyday life (or everyday games), AWL has a methodical pace that lowers blood pressure and smoothes furrowed brows.
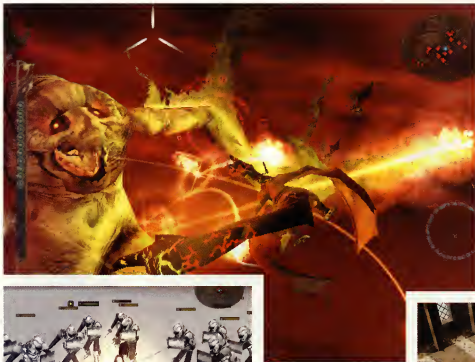
Spanning 30 virtual years, AWL is long and slow-playing. And repetitive. Very few big events happen season to season or year to year. Mostly, you sow seeds, milk cows, and collect eggs. In short, you perform all the chores inherent in farming (manure shoveling is mercifully omitted).

Despite the simplicity, there's plenty of depth to the farming experience. There's variety in the animals and produce and the freedom to focus on the aspects you

most enjoy, such as foregoing a big garden in favor of a bunch of animals. As you play, you gain access to more tools and earn money to buy more seeds, buildings, or beasts. Eventually, you can even create hybrid seeds to raise your own crazy plants. The ability to grow and streamline your farm is satisfying and keeps you playing.

While the repetition of farm life is soothing, the repetition in the human interactions is just annoying. Your wife, who you initially spend so much energy wooing, spews the same few lines of dialogue so often that you'll yearn for a divorce. Still, with all the chores, you'll probably spend little time carousing about town, anyhow. And if the mundanity gets to you, you can always go play Halo. I◄

_Carrie Shepherd

	NATSUME			
	NATSUME/MARVELOUS INTERACTIVE		PLAYERS 1	
	MARCH			JAPAN

GMR 8/10

BETTER THAN XANAX
NOT AS GOOD AS ANIMAL CROSSING
WAIT FOR IT FIELD IRRIGATION

ヤスヒロ
あ〜〜ちゃっぱりだた。

← The one major thing *Drakengard* has going for it is that it boasts some beautiful graphics and slick animation. Too bad the gameplay isn't up to snuff.

DRAKENGARD
JERK ON DRAGOON

TEEN | PS2

PUBLISHER	SQUARE ENIX
DEVELOPER	SQUARE ENIX
PRICE	$49.99
RELEASE	MARCH
PLAYERS	1
ORIGIN	JAPAN

On paper, *Drakengard* would appear to be the supersized love child of such exciting and diverse games as Koei's *Dynasty Warriors* and Sega's *Panzer Dragoon*, with a dash of *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance* thrown in. The disappointing truth, however, is that *Drakengard* as a whole does not exceed the sum of its parts.

The reason for this is rather simple: None of the game's various segments is better than the source material that inspired it. The *Dynasty Warriors* bits, for example, may indeed feature a mind-boggling array of weapons to seek out and find, but the combat isn't particularly exciting. Especially when it means looking for pockets of generic enemies to fight. And despite the fact that you're supposedly part of a major conflict (your army is always crying for help), you never see any of your troops.

And then of course you have the *Panzer* parts, which have you flying around, locking on to masses of enemies (ranging from bats to griffins to, uh, floating blocks) and letting fly with the fiery dragon breath.

The high points of the game come from the mindless but fun strafing sections, which let you bomb thousands of little guys to smithereens, and from the extra characters you can play as. But even those modes are underutilized, offering little more than a momentary diversion from the grind.

The problem with this cycle of distinct game styles is that the game feels more repetitive for it. And since the main character is an unlikable jerk and the supporting characters insipid ("I'm OK. I'm a goddess."), you never really care about what happens to them. In practice, *Drakengard* offers acceptable action gaming, but it's not likely to set the world on fire. ◄

_James Mielke

GMR RATING 6/10

BETTER THAN DRAGON RAGE
NOT AS GOOD AS *DYNASTY WARRIORS* 4XL
WAIT FOR IT *SAMURAI WARRIORS*

FIREFIGHTER F.D. 18
OOOOH, BURNED!
TEEN | PS2

➤ **Fireman Dean McGregor should think about a career change. He's sent alone into chaotic maelstroms with nary more than a water-spewing hose to defend himself.** As he battles monstrous infernos to rescue hapless survivors, his superiors are busting his balls. "Save him!" they nag, or when he fails, "You disappoint me." No hero's welcome here.

This makes *Firefighter* less a fire-fighting simulation and more a third-person action game in which it seems you must stop the evil fire monsters from consuming all of creation. The fires are big, relentless, and have a supernatural quality about them. They shoot fireballs, cause explosions, and force you to open doors that only lead

to back drafts that sucker slam you. Then you take on the fire bosses, one of which hurls fire angels with the intent to return you to the ashes from whence you came.

Firefighter does pull off something that games don't do enough: It makes you care. You'll get nervous when the life meter starts blinking and the poor schmuck you have to save is about to die. Then when Dean becomes one with the flame, you almost hurt along with him. That's good game design.

What's *not* good game design is everything else about *Firefighter*. You might forgive the amateur story because you can skip past the cut-scenes. You might look beyond the clunky graphics and limited character movement because they're serviceable. You might even turn a blind eye to some of the dull, repetitive levels because they don't last *too* long. But can you forgive the control set that has you shooting your nozzle with R1 while aiming with the right stick? You'll eventually get used to it, but will it be in enough time to find out that *F.D. 18* is a game worthy of your patience? ◄■ _Tom Byron

	KONAMI	PRICE	$39.99
	ACER	PLAYERS	1
	MARCH	ORIGIN	JAPAN

GMR 5/10

ON PAR WITH *BRAVE FIREFIGHTERS* (ARCADE)
NOT AS GOOD AS *BURNING RANGERS*
ALSO TRY *DISASTER REPORT*

POKÉMON COLOSSEUM
SPICY, BUT NICE
EVERYONE | GC

➤ **If you've dabbled in *Pokémon* but grown more and more detached from the series' overtly youthful schtick, *Colosseum* just might** be your reentry ticket into the wonderful world of monster collecting. The reasons for this could be the edgier design (particularly the main character and his souped-up hot rod) or the full-time switch to the more exciting dual-Pokémon battles first explored in *Ruby* and *Sapphire*. The switch to a relatively attractive 3D world is also a plus that gamers weary of the 2D games might enjoy.

The catch to *Colosseum* is the addition of special Shadow Pokémon that your character must actually attempt to steal from the trainers. A

sinister plot is at work, and this twist becomes the game's defining plot mechanism, although in the end, it's just another excuse to catch and collect Pokémon. Another slight issue is that while the world seems fully realized, and the interface is standard *Pokémon* issue, the game isn't nearly as massive or deep as something like *Ruby*. Perhaps this is a side effect of the move to 3D (see also: *Sonic the Hedgehog*), but that shortcoming, along with the fact that importing your *Ruby/Sapphire* collection isn't as instantaneous as it should be, means that *Colosseum* proudly carries on the tradition but does not in any way enhance it. ◄■
_James Mielke

	NINTENDO	PRICE	$49.99
	GENIUS SONORITY	PLAYERS	1-2
	MARCH	ORIGIN	JAPAN

GMR 8/10

BETTER THAN *POKÉMON CHANNEL*
NOT AS GOOD AS *POKÉMON RUBY OR SAPPHIRE*
WAIT FOR IT *POKÉMON GREEN AND BLUE*

Salah: Oh!
There's a SHADOW POKéMON!

PS2

GC

CY GIRLS
GETTING LOST SIMULATOR

TEEN | PS2

Cy Girls has an enticing concept—two cybernetic assassins, each deadly in her own right, take on a wicked megacorporation by means of advanced weaponry, ninja magic, and virtual reality.

Unfortunately, playing through Cy Girls is straight-up torturous at times. It's as if the level designers threw dice to figure out the flow of certain stages. Be prepared for hours of backtracking, puzzles with nonsensical solutions, and occasional bursts of joy when you unwittingly solve them. It's sad that an otherwise solid and interesting game can border on unplayable due to terrible, absent level design, but them's the breaks.

Apart from that, the game also feels lopsided. The scenario for Ice feels a lot more solid, and the selection of secondary moves has more legitimate applications. The cyber ninja Aska's scenario, on the other hand, is like Tenchu on crack. Just as in the venerable ninjitsu simulator, melee combat in Cy Girls feels janky. The developers must have realized that, too, since every other time Aska attacks, she busts out with some prescribed death move.

Cy Girls could have been great, but as it is, it's the type of game that you should only play with the FAQ at your side. If you go it alone, you're in for a long, repetitive ride through terrain you've already been through. ◄
_Miguel Lopez

PUB KONAMI	PRICE $39.99
DEV KONAMI	PLAYERS 1
REL MARCH	ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR
ALL MESSED UP
6/10

BETTER THAN: GETTING SHOT
NOT AS GOOD AS: SILENT BOMBER
CAN I GET A STRATEGY GUIDE?

ONIMUSHA: BLADE WARRIORS
FILET OF SOUL

TEEN | PS2

Whether you're a Capcom fan with a yen for all things Onimusha or merely a PS2 owner with a serious Smash Bros. jones, Blade Warriors is custom built to suit your needs. It would be a mistake to lump this in with Capcom's fighting-game résumé, as the play mechanics are far less demanding than those found in Street Fighter III. That's not to suggest Blade Warriors lacks strategy—taking advantage of the my/tad treasure chest items (which can be thrown at enemies to produce any number of debilitating effects) or knowing when to hit and when to block are as important and finely tuned here as they are in Nintendo's counterpart. So is knowing when to jump in and out of the multitiered backgrounds, be it a moonlit castle rooftop or a bamboo-filled forest whose trees you cut down in that classic ninja style with every errant swing of a katana.

The roster is loaded with your favorite—and not so favorite—Onimusha

characters. While it's great to rock as Samanosuke, Kaede, and Oyu, the rest of the grunts and wannabes that make up nearly half of the initial roster seem like filler. Fortunately, unlockable characters such as Mega Man (in various forms) and Onimusha 3's Garguanto (a saved game from O3 unlocks him in Blade Warriors) make up for this disparity. A solid game that shines in multiplayer, Blade Warriors is a great take on the Smash Bros. formula that would truly excel if it were applied to the entire Capcom roster. Imagine the potential. ◄
_James Mielke

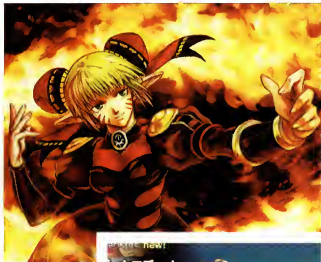| PUB CAPCOM | PRICE $39.99 |
| DEV CAPCOM | PLAYERS 1-4 |
| REL MARCH | ORIGIN JAPAN |

GMR
SHARP
7/10

BETTER THAN: DISMON RUMBLE ARENA
NOT AS GOOD AS: SUPER SMASH BROS. MELEE
WAIT FOR IT: NARUTO (PS2)

PS2

← Just like Episodes I & II, there's absolutely no problem with the audiovisual aspects of Phantasy Star Online—it's as good as ever.

GC

PSO EPISODE III: C.A.R.D. REVOLUTION
TELEVISED FOR YOUR CONVENIENCE

TEEN | GC

PUBLISHER	SEGA
DEVELOPER	SONIC TEAM
PRICE	$49.99
RELEASED	MARCH
PLAYERS	1-4
ORIGIN	JAPAN

➤ *C.A.R.D. Revolution*, so the story goes, came about almost by accident. Someone at Sonic Team liked card games and wanted to make one, so Yuji Naka said, "Sure, fine," and that's all it took. True or not, this seems like a project nobody thought very hard about.

That there's nothing in common here with other *PSO* games—outside of the art direction, anyway—isn't much of a problem. The painfully slow battles are a bigger issue. The best video card games move as fast as you can think—*Episode III*, by comparison, gives you plenty of time. Between load pauses, attack animations, and meaningless dice rolls, the amount of filler

stretching each battle is mind-boggling.

There are no options available to speed up the pace, suggesting that this game didn't see enough playtesting. If it had, someone might have noticed that the two deck types—the traditionally equipped Hunters and the monster-summoning Arkz rebels—are way out of balance at lower levels. A low-grade Hunter deck will annihilate a similar Arkz deck, a fact made obvious by a few multiplayer duels.

C.A.R.D. Revolution gets better with four experienced players involved. A 2-on-2 duel between evenly matched decks makes up for the slow battles and small scale. Building a top-notch deck means slogging through hours of

duels, though, and even the baddest deck on the Net isn't as cool as a tricked-out avatar in the original *PSO*.

There's nothing quite like this on any of the consoles today. Strategy fiends with a broadband hookup should try it for its uniqueness alone. But while *PSO* began as a genuine phenomenon, it ends with something more like a fizzled experiment. ▮◀
_Dave Smith

GMR
REVOLUTION 6/10
BETTER THAN MAGIC: THE GATHERING
NOT AS GOOD AS: DISGAEA
ALSO TRY: LOST KINGDOMS II

→ You weren't around to hear it, but shortly after filling 17 guys with lead, 007 made an especially droll comment about the manner in which he dispatched them. Oh, James.
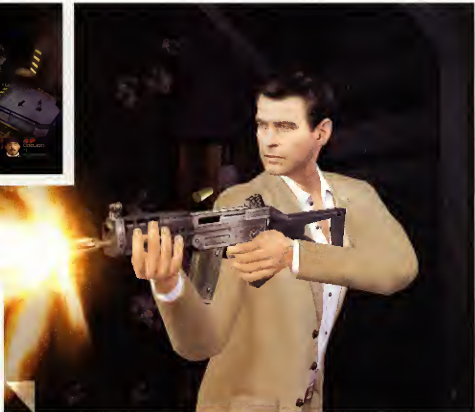
JAMES BOND 007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING

YOU GOT HOLLYWOOD IN MY VIDEOGAME

TEEN | PS2 [REVIEWED] | GC | XB

PUBLISHER   ELECTRONIC ARTS
DEVELOPER   ELECTRONIC ARTS
PRICE $49.99
RELEASE   MARCH
PLAYERS   1-4
ORIGIN   U.S.A.

▶ **Purists, be warned: The relationship between the videogame industry and the Hollywood blockbuster machine gets a little more intimate with *Everything or Nothing*, the best James Bond game since 1996's *GoldenEye* and a glimmer of hope that when game executives meet with movie executives, the end result doesn't necessarily have to be a vapid, poorly designed license cash-in.**

Everything or Nothing does an excellent job of placing you in the middle of a modern 007 film. In a subtle but significant touch, the first time you begin the game, there is no Press Start screen—the game instantly begins after the opening title sequence.

Naturally, there's more reliance on immediate action than interesting narrative or substantial dialogue...but then again, it's James Bond.

Part of what makes the 007 movies so appealing is the variety: weapons, gadgets, locations, characters, vehicles, and so on. While the basic framework might timelessly remain the same—exceptionally evil man or woman with designs of world domination concocts a diabolical plan (the kind that sounds totally absurd the first time you hear it, but then you think about it for a while and it actually seems feasible)—every time 007 sets out on an adventure, the experience seems fresh. So is the case with *Everything or Nothing*, which uses

not only the aforementioned *Bond* variables, but also different types of gameplay in order to maintain interest throughout. The core of the game is primarily 3D third-person action, but it's interspersed with the occasional and very well-done driving and flying sequences. Particularly thrilling is the motorcycle chase on the narrow freeway, evoking strong visions of what EA could have done had it been blessed with *The Matrix* license. The cohesion between 007's on-foot missions and driving excursions further adds to the cinematic feel, which is *Everything or Nothing's* strongest trait. The decision to use the real likenesses and voices of the *Bond* players, write a dedicated

← Looks like James went to spy school with one Solid Snake (One-Man Army 101, we suspect). The ability to use surroundings as cover helps a lot, considering that ammo is limited and your enemies are suspiciously competent for mere expendable henchmen. They'll actually evaluate how you played a level the first time, then adjust tactics the second time through. How deliciously clever.

← Throughout Everything or Nothing, you'll have the opportunity to take the controls of different vehicles. Normally when game concepts collide like this, many innocent bystanders are killed. But the driving (of both the automobile and motorcycle type) and the short-but-sweet helicopter chase fit perfectly with the rest of the game. And you know, it just wouldn't be Bond if you couldn't blow something up in a helicopter.

script, and pull the camera away from the first-person view makes it a slightly more immersive 007 experience than GoldenEye.

But one of GoldenEye's greatest strengths was precision targeting in the first person, and unsurprising for a 3D third-person shooter, the most frustrating aspect of Everything or Nothing is enemy targeting control. Pressing the trigger will lock on to the enemy or object that's closest to the center of the camera view. More accurate aiming can then be adjusted by using the left control stick, allowing for the all-incapacitating head shot. This works wonderfully in theory and most of the time in practice, but there's one large shortcoming. Since Bond

can't lock on to a target unless it's near the middle of the screen, any time a new enemy appears—be it from afar, above, behind, or right next to you—you'll have to either cycle through all the available targets or manually adjust the camera to bring the target into view. This wastes precious seconds and usually means (especially in the later levels and the more frustrating levels) that another anonymous star will be placed on the wall at MI6. One feature that partially alleviates targeting problems is Bond sense, a clever way of slowing down the action and choosing to blow up inanimate objects to open a new path or clear a room (or just for fun).

Everything or Nothing is an all-around polished game, and that's to be

expected from the combined power of a large game publisher and a large movie publisher. But what's not always expected is a product that's solidly designed and genuinely entertaining. They could have taken the easy way out and cashed in on the eternal cool factor of the Bond name, but instead they've set an example that hopefully other publishers possessing big-money licenses will follow. ⏴

_Andrew Pfister

2ND OPINION

I get the feeling the subtitle for this latest Bond treat was really meant to mollusce the development team. With no movie tie-in and the danger the series might be played out, there was a bit of "everything or nothing" at stake here. Well, it worked. This 007 is balanced, fun, and Bond authentic. ⏴

_Tom Byron

←Flying high and killing things is what *Nightshade* is all about. Once you're at a certain level, you'll be able to decimate swarms of flying enemies without touching the ground.

NIGHTSHADE
BEAUTY AT THE SPEED OF DEATH

MATURE | PS2

PUBLISHER	SEGA
DEVELOPER	SEGA WOW
PRICE	$39.99
RELEASE	AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS	1
ORIGIN	JAPAN

You remember Sega's *Shinobi* remake for PS2. How could you not? Your television still has the Dual Shock–shaped hole in its screen. But that's why you loved it, right? Well, *Nightshade* does good by its predecessor's legacy by being infinitely rewarding and unforgivingly difficult at the same time. The deadlier-than-beautiful Hibana has a handful of new tricks at her disposal, and the possibilities for tate (the franchise's trademark chain-kill system) madness have exponentially increased.

Nightshade is fast, beautiful, and deep. But it occasionally indulges in areas that, depending on both the level

of patience and degree of mad skills you possess, might just ruin it for you. Two words: bottomless pits. That foul design element, which should have been eradicated from gaming's lexicon decades ago, shows up in *Nightshade*—and with maddening regularity. The game's spazzy mechanics and slippery camera just don't lend themselves well to precise platforming, but in some cases, levels are even designed around it. Not surprisingly, these levels are the ones you'll end up retrying 60 or 70 times. And, as you know, retrying stages totally wrecks your mission rating, as well as your sense of self-worth. This is where *Nightshade* is at its worst.

It's a shame, 'cause there are plenty of instances in which the game is genuinely challenging in meaningful ways. The open-ended, combat-centered levels are true tests of skills, encouraging you to string together dozens of kills as you dash around the map like an unstable atom.

If you can hack it, there's a lot to like about *Nightshade*. ◄
_Miguel Lopez

2ND OPINION

It was just about this time last year that I was playing 2002 and *Nightshade* brings back a lot of fond memories. Bouncing from target to target and unleashing death with panache—there's something undeniably fun about it. It's tough, but patience pays off. ◄
_Andrew Pfister

DIGIMON RACING
MASCOTS ON GO-KARTS? NO WAY!

EVERYONE | GBA

It's pretty hard to really screw up a racing game, and it's even harder to screw up a racing game on GBA. With that in mind, Digimon Racing offers an average bit of fun for those long trips on the commuter train.

Based on the popular animated series, Digimon Racing takes the tried-and-true Mario Kart route, but with a few interesting changes. Just like in Mario Kart, the tracks are littered with cubes that provide you with a random power-up or weapon to use against other racers, and each individual Digimon can "digivolve" by running over certain areas of the track. This gives you the opportunity to charge up

for your Digimon-specific attack—and most of those are actually pretty cool.

But unfortunately, the game doesn't handle nearly as well as games like Mario Kart: Super Circuit. This is especially frustrating when paired with a track that blends a bit too well into the surrounding environment, and there are quite a few of those tracks.

The game is also doubly unforgiving if you slide off the track or bump into an obstacle or another racer. This will not only slow you down or stop you, but also often shoot you straight backward.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about this game is the addition of boss battles in between the standard racing cups. In theory, they seem like a neat idea, but unfortunately, they don't really take advantage of the fact that you're driving, so they function more like standard boss battles in an action game.

Overall, Digimon Racing is not a terrible game, but it falls short of the standards set by Nintendo. ▶◀
_Nicole Tanner

FOR	BANDAI	PRICE	$29.99
DEV	BANDAI	PLAYERS	1-6 WITH LINK CABLE
ALSO	APRIL	ORIGIN	JAPAN

GMR 6/10

NOT AS GOOD AS MARIO KART: SUPER CIRCUIT
ON PAR WITH MOST OTHER GBA RACERS
WAIT FOR IT THE NEXT PORTABLE MARIO KART

COLIN MCRAE 04
OFF THE BEATEN PATH

EVERYONE | XB

There are two types of people who enjoy racing games out there: rally buffs and everyone else. The latter enjoys sprinting around NASCAR tracks, tuning flashy imports, building their garages, and all that good stuff. For these folks, Colin McRae Rally 04 (and most rally games) should probably be avoided like the plague. However, for those who prefer racing solo, swapping spoken coordinates for in-game music, and enjoy precision over unbridled speed, McRae 04 is bound to impress.

Codemasters returns with its fourth installment in the Colin McRae series, this time trumping past efforts with 48 tracks featuring Spain, Sweden, the U.K., and more, 20 cars (including Group B's and vintage rides as well), and a host of racing and multiplayer options, to boot. Kudos to McRae 04's amazing physics, varied terrain, and three distinct cameras, which alter the variety of gameplay in a big way.

Lush visuals, precise controls, fully customizable vehicles, and a sweet $19.99 price tag further work to make the game worth owning—at least for die-hard rally fans.

But this value hits a bumpy stretch with a few minor setbacks: Breakable objects have no rhyme or reason here, as massive barrels topple over when hit while fluffy bushes and small bales stop vehicles in their tracks. The navigator's jarbled Scottish accent further muddles his coordinate-heavy lingo (which mainstream gamers won't understand to begin with), and lastly, the arrow indicators appearing onscreen are set to appear a little too early, which might throw off your navigational senses every once in a while.

Precise, demanding, and about as tough as rally racing gets, Colin McRae Rally 04 should be approached by those predisposed to driving on dirt. ▶◀
_Mark Manzo

FOR	CODEMASTERS	PRICE	$19.99
DEV	CODEMASTERS	PLAYERS	1-2
ALSO	AVAILABLE NOW	ORIGIN	U.K.

GMR 7/10

BETTER THAN DAKAR 2
ALSO TRY RALLY FUSION: RACE OF CHAMPIONS
WAIT FOR IT RALLISPORT CHALLENGE 2

XB

GBA

← If you're going to be wielding shotgun death in your spare time, might as well look your spiffiest. While it's unlikely that Mafia will usher in the return of the pinstripe suit as standard-issue business apparel, it does serve to remind us all of a happier and more fashionable era, when racketeering and murder-for-hire was committed with a touch of class.

MAFIA
TOP OF THE WORLD, MA!

PUBLISHER:	GATHERING
DEVELOPER:	ILLUSION SOFTWORKS
PRICE:	$49.99
RELEASE:	AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS:	1
ORIGIN:	U.S.A.

MATURE | PS2 [REVIEWED] | XB

The tried-and-true *GTA*-style formula of driving, shooting, and playing the bad guy in a bustling city gets a blast from the past with Illusion Softworks' port of *Mafia* for PS2. Fancy suits, vintage cars, and even big-band tunes set the stage for old-school action lifted straight from an episode of *The Untouchables*. But something's a little off here....

As authentic as the time period, environments, and story lines are, *Mafia* just feels numbingly slow in nearly every category. For starters, load times are some of the worst seen on PS2 and absolutely kill the flow of the game when crossing a bridge or opening a menu. PC ports and PS2 generally don't mix, and load times like these are often a prime example of why. (Max Payne, anyone?)

In addition, the gameplay, though fun and novel, feels sluggish and at times clunky, whether the player is operating a vehicle, busting a cap in a firefight, or simply walking. With games such as *Vice City*, *True Crime*, and *The Getaway* further solidifying this subgenre, gamers are used to a certain sense of speed and intensity in titles like these, but *Mafia* falls flat by trying too hard to realistically reproduce the handling of older cars and weaponry. Considering that '30s-era-gangster films speed up their car chases for excitement, a similar approach should have been taken with this game.

But when all is said and done, *Mafia* still has a lot to offer: The competent graphics, incredible music and dialogue, top-notch story, cinemas, and ambience all work to create a virtual time machine. If players can get around *Mafia*'s slow pace and PS2 load times, they're sure to find some gold in this version of Al Capone's vault. ◄
_Mark Manzo

GMR SPICY MEATBALL **7/10**

BETTER THAN: TRUE CRIME
ON PAR WITH: THE GETAWAY
WAIT FOR IT: GTA 4

2ND OPINION

It's hard to deny the appeal of free-roaming games, but *Mafia* just moves too slow to hold any long-term interest. While the automobiles of the 1920s may have actually had poor speed and handling, the realism doesn't make it any more fun. Better for a weekend rental. ◄
_Andrew Pfister

BOMBERMAN JETTERS
GAMECUBE GO BOOM

EVERYONE | GC

The bomb, as an object of personal and cultural expression, has long been maligned. Still, whenever there is stuff to explode, whenever a hated enemy cries out for the stinging kiss of TNT in an attractively shaped bulbous package, true social innovators like Bomberman will be there.

Bomberman Jetters assumes that Planet Bomber is under assault, and the classic console hero Bomberman returns to give its attackers the old what-for. In the single-player adventure, players control either Bomberman White or Max, traipsing through a world designed by clever sadists and brightly colored by first-graders.

Perhaps more sugary than the common Pixie Stix, *Jetters'* single-player adventure tasks our heroes to blow cute stuff to hell and back while navigating mazelike environments. Worlds are colored in exaggerated pinks and blues, and the cel-shaded heroes and villains more than emphasize the game's cartoonish aspect. At times, the game's saccharine sensibilities make the challenges, though very real, hard to swallow. When it comes time to fight a giant hermit crab with a brightly painted green-and-red-striped shell, the enormity of the situation is drastically lessened by the appearance of a cute woman who promptly

announces, "Be careful! An area boss is approaching!"

The airy solo mode provides a modicum of entertainment but is easily beaten, mostly because enemies are exceedingly dumb and oftentimes delight in walking right over bombs placed in their paths. Better by far are *Jetters'* battle-game multiplayer options, in which up to four players destroy a series of mazes in frantic attempts at blowing up the opposition. *Jetters* upholds the series' fine tradition of being a multiplayer behemoth. To swipe liberally from Microsoft, it really is good to blow sh*t up together. Amen.
_Greg Orlando

GMR FLAMMABLE **6**/10

PUB	MAJESCO	PRICE	$39.99
DEV	HUDSON SOFT	PLAYERS	1-4
REV	FLUIDILLY	ORIGIN	JAPAN

BETTER THAN: SUPER BUBBLE POP 3D
WORSE THAN: BOMBERMAN GENERATIONS
WAIT FOR IT: WORMS 3D

ROMANCE OF THE THREE KINGDOMS IX
HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

EVERYONE | PS2

The past is alive in Koei's *Romance of the Three Kingdoms IX*. And once again, the action takes place in ancient China, during a time of epic battles for total dominance of the land, its resources, and its people. You assume the role of a ruler (from history or of your making) and build up your kingdom by investing in resources, learning how to deal with friends and foes, developing an army that will be victorious in battle, and ultimately, unifying China.

The biggest difference from previous installments is that you start off as a ruler, whereas before you could assume different ranks. Some will regard this as a significant loss, while others will be happy to cut to the chase.

There are numerous scenarios and campaigns to choose from (some historical, some fictitious), as well as countless endings to reach and side stories to explore. It's a deep game with a lot to do. Perhaps too much.

Fans of the genre will enjoy the game's vast scope, but novices will be

overwhelmed and confused. Even with advice offered every step of the way, it's easy to lose track of the countless things that need your attention, and the bottom line is that victory or defeat hinges on seemingly innocuous choices.

If you do play, let it be for the challenge, not the visuals. The series has always sported 16-bit-like graphics, but this installment is actually a step down from the last game. Hope you find the map screen pretty, because you'll be seeing it a lot. The music, while not quite appropriate for the era, is still tolerable after the 100th hour, which is much appreciated.

So, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms IX* isn't suitable for first-timers to the genre, but will fans of the series enjoy it? Well, yes, but not as much as they could have. If it weren't for an enhanced combat system, it would be a definite step down from *Kingdoms VIII*—ultimately, it's more of the same. Purchase with caution.
_Matthew Hawkins

GMR **7**/10

PUB	KOEI	PRICE	$49.99
DEV	KOEI	PLAYERS	1-8
REV	AVAILABLE NOW	ORIGIN	JAPAN

BETTER THAN: READING A HISTORY BOOK
ON PAR WITH: ROMANCE OF THE THREE
KINGDOMS VIII
WAIT FOR IT: SAMURAI WARRIORS

WORMS 3D
THE MONTY PYTHON OF STRATEGIC WARFARE

TEEN | PS2 (REVIEWED) | GC | PC | XB

The third dimension is something of a mixed blessing for games. It is, for some franchises, a welcome and bedazzling change. For others, it amounts to a bandwagon-jumping disaster. *Worms 3D* **doesn't quite fit either of these descriptions.**

Like its predecessors, *Worms 3D* has a simple premise: You control a team of militant crawlies charged with annihilating the opposing army in a turn-based deathmatch. You've got an arsenal of destructive weapons at your disposal, from typical firearms such as bazookas and shotguns to outlandish instruments of death such as exploding sheep and holy hand grenades.

Unfortunately, waging war is often a frustrating case of trial and error. There are multiple factors to consider when planning your attack, such as distance, trajectory, force, wind velocity, and individual weapon quirks. You'll get the hang of it after some practice, but it definitely takes some getting used to.

The single-player mode, with its haphazard and uneven A.I., grows old pretty quickly. The game shines a bit more brightly in multiplayer mode, which pits up to four players against one another on randomly generated (and often downright illogical) maps. Multiple controllers aren't necessary, since players swap a single pad.

Ultimately, *Worms 3D* is a bit of an acquired taste. If you dig its goofy sense of humor, or if you're a fan of previous *Worms* games, you might find something to like once you get past the 3D-induced flaws.

_Ryan Scott

GMR

PUB	ACCLAIM	ESRB	$39.99
TECH	TEAM 17	PLAYERS	1-4
REL	FEBRUARY	MINI-GAMES	N.A.

SNAPSHOT

5 /10

BETTER THAN: ARMY MEN 3D
NOT AS GOOD AS: SILENT STORM
WE NEED: MORE EXPLODING SHEEP

Red Bull
100
Human Torso

XB
PC
PS2
GC

MX UNLEASHED
BIKES GONE WILD

EVERYONE | PS2 (REVIEWED) | XB

What's the hottest trend in gaming today? Freedom. No matter what the genre, an increasing number of gamers want to be able to go where they want to go, do what they want to do, and just break out of the box altogether. *GTA* **set the stage for this, and now games like** *Tony Hawk's Underground* **are the latest to ride the "do whatever" wave.**

Enter *MX Unleashed*. Though the series' crowning jewel provides standard MX fare such as a multitude of tracks, rides, and gear to enjoy, *Unleashed* takes things one step further by allowing players to do virtually everything, from tearing around in monster trucks to jumping into hot-air balloons with tricked-out bikes if the mood suits them.

But does this game take its sport seriously? Sure does. With the multitude of pro riders (such as Travis Preston, Matt Walker, and Brandon Jesseman), bikes (Yamaha, KTM, Suzuki, and more), and arenas

(Chicago, Memphis, and Vegas, just to name a few) *Unleashed* offers, it's enough to wow even the most hardcore MX junkie at the selection menu. Toss in realistic physics, authentic stunts, and varied terrain, and it's clear that *MXU* still knows its roots and loves its audience.

Casual gamers may love that stuff too, but they will thrive more on the newfound sense of exploration in freestyle mode, as well as the ability to pilot biplanes and more for added kicks (those looking for *Freakstyle*-inspired tracks and stunts, however, need to look elsewhere...might we suggest *Freakstyle*?).

Still, we struggle with *MXU*'s collision problems, floatiness while jumping, and the decision to scrap *MX Superfly*'s stunt track editor. These work to frustrate and unfortunately take things down a bit. The end result is a wild racing title, though nothing too "freaky."

_Mark Manzo

GMR

PUB	THQ	PRICE	$39.99
TECH	RAINBOW STUDIOS	PLAYERS	2 (HALF THE TIME)
REL	AVAILABLE NOW	MINI-GAMES	N.A.

FULL THROTTLE

6 /10

BETTER THAN: MX 2002
NOT AS GOOD AS: FREAKSTYLE
WAIT FOR IT: MTX: MOTOTRAX FEATURING TRAVIS PASTRANA

RETRO/ACTIVE

SOME TREASURES OF THE PAST—AND THE REAL PHANTOM MENACE

XB
PC
PS2
GBA
GC

MISCHIEF MAKERS
GRAB HOLD AND HANG ON TIGHT

N64 | SEPTEMBER 1997

Treasure's *Silhouette Mirage* and *Dynamite Heddy* concentrate their uniqueness in heroes who are unusual because of their abilities and tools. *Mischief Makers* flips that idea on its head—robot heroine Marina can't do much besides grab things and shake them—making you work with what the world gives you, rather than beating it into shape yourself.

Treasure is probably better at doing it the other way around. *Mischief Makers* features some fascinating level-design constructions, showing the developer's knack for 2D puzzle design that resurfaces in Bangaioh, but navigating those levels requires a precision that the N64 controller isn't up to. Double-tap controls don't go well with a stiff D-pad, and the camera buttons aren't quite a workable substitute.

As always, though, the character designs make it worth the trouble. Wes Craven's *Scream* inspired the enemy 'peons' faces, and the hulking Blockman was a fun throwback to a level boss from *Gunstar Heroes*. *Sin and Punishment* is more fun, but *Mischief Makers* hangs on to the classic Treasure style. ◄◄

NOW... Stiff controls and blurry backgrounds say 'pass the Saturn pad.' TOASTY 6

THEN... When the only alternative is Yoshi's Island, a side-scroller doesn't need much to succeed. SHOOK UP 8

STRETCH PANIC
STRETCHED JUST A LITTLE THIN

PS2 | AUGUST 2001

After knocking out *Silphed* as little more than a programming exercise, Treasure seemed poised to do great things on PS2. So nobody knew what to make of this oddity.

Stretch Panic is a 3D-engine demo, albeit one you can play. Its gimmick is your ability to stretch and snap back any surface in real time, be it a piece of the background or the breasts of a bouncing knocker-demon. There's a bizarre story backing it all up—the tool that does the stretching is a magical scarf wielded as a third hand by a girl on a mission to rescue her devil-possessed sisters.

It's a fun game to look at, and it has a clever control scheme. But the fun doesn't last—the adventure amounts to a string of boss battles that's over almost before it begins. An interesting curiosity, maybe, but it's a shame if you paid full price for it. ◄◄

NOW... Like a sketch before a masterpiece, only Treasure never bothered to finish the painting. SNAP! 5

THEN... Am I...not enjoying a Treasure game...? Fanboy circuits do not compute... STRETCH 7

FINAL FANTASY: THE SPIRITS WITHIN
"MY, AREN'T YOU REALISTIC LOOKING!"

THEATERS | JULY 2001 | DVD | AUGUST 2002

It's hard to believe it's been three years since the much-heralded arrival of the first computer-generated feature film to emulate realistic human actors fizzled out so spectacularly. The first and last major venture by the fledgling Square Pictures (not counting the work the team did for "The Final Flight of the Osiris" in *The Animatrix*) brought a swift and untimely end not only to the production studio, but also to *Final Fantasy* creator Hironobu Sakaguchi's storied Square career.

The reasons for that are fairly obvious. The movie cost an estimated $150 million to make and yet barely scraped together $31 million at the box office. Sure, some costs were recouped with the DVD release, but Japanese companies are not given to taking failures lightly, so shortly after the movie disappeared from theaters, Square Pictures was finished.

But why did the movie tank so hard? Despite an all-star cast of voice actors, including Ming-Na, Donald Sutherland, Ving Rhames, Alec Baldwin, Steve Buscemi, and James Woods, Sakaguchi's high-concept Gaia/spirit/Phantom tree-hugging plot didn't quite resonate with audiences the way Square Pictures hoped it would. More fascinating was the effect that the stunningly humanesque cast had on viewers. Sure, on a technical level, *The Spirits Within* was a visual masterpiece. The beautifully modeled characters juxtaposed against the barren post-Phantom invasion wasteland were a precision mix of eye-searing SGI-workstation graphics and some expertly utilized motion-capture techniques. But the human eye isn't easily fooled, and when put up against a lifetime of watching real people do real things, the cast of *Spirits Within* was clearly missing that certain something.

Ultimately, the big problem was just that *Spirits Within* didn't offer regular audiences a particularly compelling reason to check it out once the shine wore off the virtual-actor schtick, and gamers really just wanted to see someone bust out a Bahamut—not a Ben Affleck look-alike emoting unconvincingly. In the end, *The Spirits Within* is still a decent sci-fi flick that simply snapped under the scrutiny of expectation. ◼
_James Mielke

← At one time, Square Pictures had intended to release a special version of the movie (playable only on a PS2), which would let you edit scenes to your taste in real time. Never quite happened, though. Boo, Square, boo!

	MINS	
NOW... We'd still rather see CG-rendered chocobos, thanks.	**7**	**10**
THEN... An impressive but ultimately unfulfilling experience.	**7**	**10**

MORE

TIPS. CODES. ONLINE. AND MORE

» THIS MONTH IN MORE

⌄ MORE
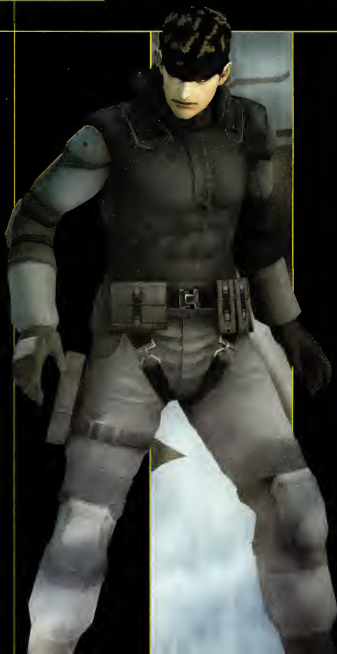
METAL GEAR SOLID: THE TWIN SNAKES

WE'LL TEACH YOU HOW TO STUNT

GETTING ALL SOLID SNAKE ON THEM

➡ While it may bother you to beat up on *Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes*'s charismatic and personable cast, you had best get over it. These people are out to *kill you!* In a case like this, what's your only option, soldier? That's right—to kill them first. Now go get them, you murder machine.

REVOLVER OCELOT

➡ This guy was easy in the original *MGS*, and he's even easier now thanks to first-person shooting. Basically, you run in circles around the room and wait till you have a clear shot. This happens most often while Ocelot is reloading his gun—watch his bullet count next to his life bar. Once you have a shot, unload your clip on him (remember, head shots provide maximum carnage). Socom ammo is lying around, so running out shouldn't be a problem. Just be careful not to trip the wire that's rigged to Baker—if you do that, it's game over.

M-1 TANK

➡ Your first order when fighting this thing is to jam its sensors with a chaff grenade. This will prevent it from putting a big hole in your chest with its main cannon. Once you do that, feel free to run up close to it, drop a few mines, and bait it toward them. After three or four successful detonations, you'll have basically paralyzed it. Now it's time to get busy. See that guy in the gunner's station? He needs to blow up. Throw grenades at him until he does so. Do the same to the second guy that comes out. If you stay close enough to the tank, you'll remain out of its main cannon's range. All you'll have to worry about are the Vulcan cannons. When they start to fire, just roll out of the way and circle behind the gunner's station. You can run much faster than it rotates.

NINJA

➡ Guns are for punks, and the Ninja reminds you of this at the fight's outset. Just start whaling on him as soon as you see him. He likes it. He's pretty easy during the first phase—just beat on him and avoid his counterattacks by rolling or running in the opposite direction. After a while, he'll go into stealth mode and hide in random spots throughout the room. If you switch on your thermal goggles, you'll see him, though, so keep them on and smack him once you get into fisticuffs range. After a while of this, he'll switch it up again. He'll once again be down for close-quarters combat, but he'll phase in and out during your attacks, often appearing behind you for maximum punishment. The best thing to do is to stagger your attacks and switch directions midcombo. You can also throw chaff grenades to stun him and get a few cheap punches in, if you feel like being wasteful. After you pummel him enough, he'll go away and Otacon will come out.

That's good, Snake!

PSYCHO MANTIS

Step one. Knock out Meryl with your fists or with a stun grenade. It's not cool to hit women, but think of it this way: Since Mantis is controlling Meryl, you're not really hitting her, you're hitting him. That should soothe your aching conscience. Once Meryl is out cold, switch your controller to another port—otherwise, Mantis will be able to "read" your mind and avoid all your incoming attacks. He'll still mad dog you with all the furnishings and décor in his room, but you'll at least be able to hit him. Use your Socom and aim for his head. Be careful, though—if you stay in first-person mode too long, he'll scramble your vision. Shoot quickly and make your shots count. Also, once he declares that he can read your thoughts, switch ports. You'll have to do this a few times during the fight. Soon enough, he'll start teleporting around the room, shooting crazy energy balls at you. Dodge them, switch into first-person mode, and blast him. After a while of this, he'll animate Meryl again, to which you have to respond, unfortunately, by knocking her out. He'll start to panic after this, which you'll exacerbate by shooting him in the head some more.
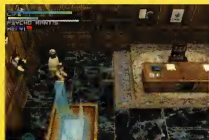
SNIPER WOLF

It may seem like a shame to hurt her, but Sniper Wolf has a big gun aimed at your head, so get over it. The strategy for beating her is easy—just wait until she exposes herself and blast her with your own rifle, preferably in the head. Kneel to stabilize your scope, and take some Pentazemin if you want a steadier shot. If your scope becomes flooded with red light, that means she's got a bead on you. Unequip your gun as quickly as you can and run for cover. Fighting Wolf takes a lot of patience, so don't waste shots. Get her when she's exposed and you should be cool. The second time you fight her, you'll have Stinger missiles, which should make things much easier—just lock on to her when she's not hiding behind something and let them rip.

HIND

You'd think it'd be difficult to take down a Russian gunship with a measly rocket launcher, but life is strange sometimes. Basically, just lock on to the chopper with your Stinger missiles when it isn't obscured by anything and blast away. When Liquid yells "Eat this!" take it as your cue to find cover in the lower areas—his missiles can hurt quite a bit. But if you're smart, this fight can be disappointingly simple.

60

VULCAN RAVEN

➡ This guy is no joke, so you have to be pretty careful when you're fighting him. The safest way is to plant C4s all over the map and then, using your radar, detonate them when he walks over them. Another strategy is to trail him from a distance and blast him with Stinger missiles. Alternately, you can flank him on intersections and blast away. Whatever you do, though, don't let him see you—his Vulcan cannon will tear you to shreds faster than you can say, "I feel asleep."

METAL GEAR REX

➡ OK, this is another two-phase fight. It's not as tough as you'd think, though. First, keep your chaff grenades handy—if you use them, you'll be able to scramble Rex's sensors, which prevents you from taking much damage. Stay at midrange (well away from its feet—they'll squash you like a rogue tick) and aim for the radar-looking thing on its right shoulder with your Stinger missiles. Keep dropping chaffs in between and you should be cool. After you disable it, you'll enjoy a touching cut-scene involving you, Liquid, and the Ninja. Once you wipe your tears away, equip your Stingers again, 'cause guess what? It's time for phase two. Chaffs won't work this time, so do your best to roll out of the missiles' way when Liquid blasts you. This time around, you have to shoot Rex in the crotch (where Liquid is sitting) for maximum damage. You might be tempted to stay close to him while you're fighting him, but be wary—he has a crotch-mounted laser that's pretty deadly. Just be quick, watch for missiles, and take those crotch shots whenever you're clear.
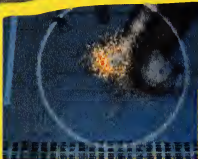
LIQUID SNAKE

➡ After a riveting tirade, Liquid Snake offers to snuff you with his fists. You have no choice but to accept. But don't trip, 'cause he's easy. Just smack him up as much as possible while avoiding his attacks. For maximum efficiency, smack him from the sides and run away before he can counterattack. If he manages to knock you over Rex's edge, just pull yourself back up like you would from any other platform. It's that easy. Liquid is kind of a crappy final boss, but after dealing with Rex, you've earned the break. ◀

What's wrong, Snake?

GC

A.I.
HIS CODES ARE REAL, BUT HE IS NOT

Our A.I. bot recently took some time off in the hot Hawaiian sun but blew several servos when it tried to surf like Kelly Slater. After a trip to Toshi Station to pick up some power converters, it's back and ready for action. Just don't comment on its lack of a tan. Creatures of pure intellect are a delicate bunch.

01 SONIC HEROES PS2/XB/GC

➔ Sonic has been missed, but he's now back on all consoles. Naturally, it wouldn't be quite right if nothing was unlockable in this title, and Sega has come through. The emblems in the game unlock hidden two-player modes. Here's the breakdown.

20 emblems	Two-Player Team Battle
40 emblems	Two-Player Special Stage
60 emblems	Two-Player Ring Race
80 emblems	Two-Player Bobsled Race
100 emblems	Two-Player Quick Race
120 emblems	Two-Player Expert Race

02 SPY HUNTER 2 PS2/XB/GC

➔ The original Spy Hunter from the golden age of arcade games is and forever will be a classic. Midway has since revamped it in 3D, and the sequel is proving popular with a new generation of fans.

To unlock all missions and weapons, go to the Main menu and enter L1, Black, White, R1, R1, White, Black, L1.

If you're having trouble in the game itself, no worries. Pause it and then enter these codes for a boost that even James Bond would appreciate.

Infinite Ammo	R1, L1, Black, Black, White, R1, L1, Black, White
Invincibility	L1, L1, L1, Black, L1, R1, R1, L1, Black

03 NFL STREET PS2/XB/GC

➔ Playing football while wearing protective gear is for sissies. That's why EA's latest pigskin classic is a game that separates the men from the boys. Enter these case-sensitive codes at the Profile Name screen for some hard-hitting goodies.

Unlock All Fields	Travel
Unlock the X-ecutioners Team	Excellent
Unlock the NFL Legends Team	Classic

04 RATCHET & CLANK: GOING COMMANDO PS2

➔ Insomniac Games is one of the few studios that rewards consumer loyalty; one example of this is its addition of a cool saved-game trick to Twisted Metal: Black and War of the Monsters. The company has included this feature in Going Commando. If you have a saved game from the original Ratchet & Clank on your memory card, go to the level 4 vendor on Planet Barlow. You'll automatically earn five weapons.
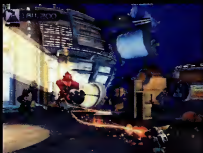
05 PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME PS2/XB/GC

➔ When Jordan Mechner created the original Prince of Persia for PC back in 1989, he had no idea that a sequel created 15 years later [yikes, we're getting old—Ed.] would rocket to the top of the charts. The original game is tucked away in every version of Sands of Time, but it's somewhat difficult to find. Here's how:

Once you're about a third of the way into the game, you'll earn a sword that can break walls. Keep progressing through the game, smashing walls, but be sure to turn the sound up. Eventually, you'll smash a wall and then hear the Prince say, "It's said this palace was built on the ruins of another," which is a reference to the original game. Go to the next room and you'll find a switch. Smash the wall the switch is on (it looks like a normal wall) with your new sword. Enter the new room and the original game will be unlocked. You can access it from the Extra Features menu.

XB

PS2

GC

MORE
tips codes strategies online and more!

06 SECRET WEAPONS OVER NORMANDY PS2/XB

➔ If you find that you can't quite fly the friendly skies, use one of these codes to shift the battle in your favor. If you own the PC version, edit the .INI file. Enter these codes at the Main Title screen. Also, if you'd like to wickedly cheat, beat all 15 campaign missions and all 21 challenge missions to unlock an X-wing and a TIE fighter. This was made by LucasArts, after all.

Xbox
Infinite Ammo
Up, Right, Down, Left, Up, Right, Down, Left, L1, R1
Invulnerability
Up, Down, Left, Right, Left, Left, Right, Right, L1, L1, R1, R1, White, Black

PS2
Infinite Ammo
Up, Right, Down, Left, Up, Right, Down, Left, L1, R1
Invulnerability
Up, Down, Left, Right, Left, Left, Right, Right, L1, L1, R1, R1, L2, R2

07 SPAWN: ARMAGEDDON PS2/XB/GC

➔ Life's rough when you've been sucked into hell, your wife marries your best friend, you impregnate her with the Antichrist, and both demons and angels want to kill you. If you've been having trouble unleashing your wrath, pause the game and enter these codes. They work on every system. If you enter the code correctly, you'll hear Spawn say, "Ah, Necrolicious."

All Weapons	Up, Down, Left, Right, Left, Right, Left, Left
Infinite Ammo	Up, Down, Left, Right, Up, Left, Down, Right
Infinite Health/Necroplasm	Up, Down, Left, Right, Right, Left, Down, Up
Unlock All Comics	Up, Down, Left, Right, Right, Left, Left, Up
Unlock All Missions	Up, Down, Left, Right, Left, Left, Right, Right
Complete Encyclopedia	Up, Down , Left, Right, Left, Right, Up, Down

08 EYETOY PS2 PERIPHERAL

➔ Chances are good that if you picked up an EyeToy, you'll want to show it off to all your friends. To unlock every game that comes with it, go to the Title screen and press Up, Down, Up, Down, L1, L2, L1, L2.

09 LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE PS2/XB

➔ Kain and Raziel are two of gaming's most enduring archenemies, and they're back and ready for blood in *Defiance*. Being a vampire isn't easy, what with holy water, sunlight, and that valley chick from California, so we've thrown in some codes to help you even the odds.

Xbox

Invincibility	Up, Down, Right, Down, R1, Black, Down, Y, L1
Max Health	Left, Right, Left, Right, R1, L1, B, Y, Down
Tube Reaver	Up, Down, Left, Right, Black, White, Y, Down, B

PS2

Invincibility	Up, Down, Right, Down, R1, R2, Down, Triangle, L1
Max Health	Left, Right, Left, Right, R1, L1, Circle, Triangle, Down
Tube Reaver	Up, Down, Left, Right, R2, L2, Triangle, Down, and Circle

10 THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: COLLECTOR'S EDITION GC

➔ *Zelda*. The classic code. The one that started it all (OK, the Konami code notwithstanding). This comes from way back in 1987, when *The Legend of Zelda* burst on the scene and revolutionized videogames forever. To access the game's hidden second quest, enter *Zelda* as your character name.

CONNECT
GAMECUBE GETS THE HOOKUP
ONLINE GAMING

UNFRIENDLY FIRE

Which one of my SOCOM II: U.S. Navy SEALs teammates kaboomed my keister with a grenade? You're dead meat!

Or not. According to Sony, as many as 33,000 couch-potato commandos play *SOCOM II* online at any given time. That's larger than some third-world armies, so it's easy for mean-spirited players—called "griefers" in online slang—to wreak havoc on their own teams and then fade into the masses. Developer Zipper made safeguards to stop cheaters, not griefers, so it's up to players to patrol these troublemakers. Let's target the most bogus griefer habits.

Thou shalt not kill teammates
This includes players who launch grenades willy-nilly, hoping to hit enemies with dumb luck.
The solution: Vote griefers outta the game.

Thou shalt not artificially inflate your stats. You think you're clever playing on a closed server with like-minded cheaters who cooperate to boost your ranks...
The solution: ...but you'll get smeared when you play against skilled players who actually earned their high stats.

Thou shalt not abuse the microphone. We don't want to hear your amateur hip-hop.
The solution: Mute obnoxious players. Or, better yet, troopers who talk strategy should switch to the Offense or Defense subchannel—option-screen settings that most griefers never discovered. ▶
—*Crispin Boyer*
Senior editor, Electronic Gaming Monthly

WELCOME TO WARP ZONE
AMBITIOUS FAN PROJECT BRINGS GAMECUBE ONLINE
NEWS

Nintendo's decision to practically forgo online connectivity with its GameCube console was a pretty silly one—heck, just imagine how awesome it would be to play games such as *Super Smash Bros. Melee, Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles,* and *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* over the Internet. Though online play has been little more than a pipe dream for GameCube owners up until now, a resourceful group of fans just might have found a purpose for that near-useless GameCube broadband adapter.

The Warp Pipe Project (www.warppipe.com) was started in July 2003 by a group of determined fans with the goal of bringing GameCube online—and they've done it. Warp Pipe uses Internet IP tunneling, which enables LAN-supported games to function across the Internet. What this means is that any game that supports multiple GameCube systems (currently *Kirby Air Ride, 1080° Avalanche,* and *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!*) is fair game for Net play.

There are a few hitches, though. Since Warp Pipe works only with games that feature multisystem support, you won't be administering an international *Super Smash Bros. Melee* smackdowns anytime soon. You'll also need a fast broadband Internet connection to play—dial-up just won't cut it here. Not everything is running at full speed just yet, but the team is working diligently to iron out all the kinks. It may not be

everything that GameCube fans want, but the Warp Pipe Project is certainly an impressive start. Take the hint, Nintendo! ▶
— *Ryan Scott*

DOWNLOAD THIS! ▶
Every month, we'll pick three of the most interesting or appropriate downloads we come across. Like these!

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME DEMO
www.prince-of-persia.com/

If you haven't checked out last year's critically acclaimed action game *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time,* you don't know what you're missing. Check out the new PC demo and see what all the hoopla is about! ▶

METAL GEAR SOLID: THE TWIN SNAKES PROMOTIONAL MOVIE
www.konamijpn.com/

One of the most popular PS1 games of all time has been remade for GameCube, and publisher Konami has prepared a huge 27-minute trailer that showcases the game in all its remixed glory. ▶

XFIRE
www.xfire.com/

For all you hardcore PC gamers, this new instant-messaging client lets you see which games your buddies are playing, chat with friends online, and meet other gamers for multiplayer matchups. ▶

MY LIFE IN VANA'DIEL
A MONTHLY TRAVELOGUE OF ONE EDITOR'S TIME IN FINAL FANTASY XI

← Meet Milkman's four other characters: Gyogi, Sade, Lychee and Gatecrasher. You never know which one you'll see!

Lychee

Sade

MILKMAN

Gatecrasher

Gyogi

RED MAGE/WHITE MAGE

MAIN JOB LEVEL	25
SUBJOB LEVEL	12
NATION	WINDURST
RACE	HUME
SERVER	SIREN
LINKSHELL	ROUNDABOUTS

OK, so I didn't quite get to level 30 this month like I planned, but there's a good reason for it. After I spent a couple days in Quifim stampeding up to level 25, I decided to take a break from my stupendous progress and raise my thief up to level 15 (so that her treasure hunter skill would kick in and help finance my expensive red mage).

That's right, I have a second character, and what's more, I actually have five. Why? To get as much of a taste as possible of what the other character classes, races, and nations feel like to play with/as/in. The pitfall in raising so many characters is the jack-of-all-trades syndrome. Time spent leveling one character is time spent away from leveling my main dude, **Milkman**, so because of that, if I devote any time bringing anyone up to speed, it'll be with **Gyogi** (Japanese for "behavior"), my most excellent mithra thief. My goal with Gyogi is to make her a bad-ass ranger, although she eventually will grow to be a high-powered samurai/ranger combo. Nothing looks cooler than a medium-sized cat chick walking around

in pimped-out samurai gear. You know this to be true.

Ever since this column first hit streets a couple months back, I've been besieged by messages from well-wishers and *GMR* readers alike. And that's only from the people on Siren. I can't imagine what it would be like logging on if players from all servers could send me "tells." But it's cool. I knew what I was getting into when I printed my character info in the mag, so here's a big HOLLA to everyone who's said hello. It's great to hear from you all and I welcome your messages.

That said, I'm going to crank out a few shout-outs, starting with **Bluefirewnx** of the **Warrior Nation Network**, whose enthusiastic members were instructed to say "Yo!" to me whenever they logged on. The ever-present and helpful **Kaiseran** (level 54 at press time) also deserves a mention, as does **Wraeth**, an EB manager based somewhere in the wild, bear-filled country called "Canada." Happy hunting to you all, and next month level 30 is *mine*. Believe it! ◄
_ James Mielke

THE LIST
GMR'S EXHAUSTIVE GUIDE TO THE ONLY GAMES THAT MATTER

BUYERS' GUIDE

➜ PS2 TOP 100 FIND THE NEW ENTRIES AND WIN BIG!

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	PRIOR RATING	RATING
.hack//Mutation	Bandai	We've exhausted our supply of "something within a something" jokes, so just know that the series starts to pick up in this sequel.		8
Amplitude	Sony	A whole slew of new artists who, naturally, bring along brand-new tunes for your button-pressing pleasure.		8
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance	Interplay	A beautiful-looking *Dungeons & Dragons*–based hack-n-slash that can be played cooperatively with another player.		8
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	*Rayman* creator Michel Ancel has done it again: *BG&E* is a spectacular adventure.		9
Bombastic	Capcom	Kudos to Capcom for bringing over the excellent *Devil Dice* series. Roll those dice, daddy needs a new pair of DualShocks.		8
Breath of Fire: Dragon Quarter	Capcom	An RPG that forces you to die and start over multiple times? It sounds ridiculous, but it actually works.		8
Burnout 2: Point of Impact	Acclaim	An aggressive driving simulator that defies the rules of physics. Includes a dedicated crash mode for aspiring demolition-derby stars.		9
Capcom vs. SNK 2	Capcom	Take the best elements of *Street Fighter* and *King of Fighters*, and you'll have the best thing going in the world of 2D combat.		8
Castlevania: Lament of Innocence	Konami	The *Castlevania* franchise goes 3D (again!). It's different from what we're used to, but it's still good.		6
Champions of Norrath	Sony Online	A hefty, highly replayable top-down action-RPG that outclasses *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II*.		8
Chaos Legion	Capcom	Storm through 15 levels of nonstop action, commanding various squads of bodyguards. It's like *Devil May Cry*, only not so antisocial.		6
Colin McRae Rally 3	Codemasters	A superb rally racer with superrealistic properties—right down to the extended time you spend sitting in the Ford Focus.		8
Contra: Shattered Soldier	Konami	After numerous shoddy attempts to bring the classic *Contra* gameplay to a next-gen system, Konami finally gets it right.		8
Dance Dance Revolution: DDRMax	Konami	Before, if you wanted to play *DDR*, you had to subject yourself to Joe and Jane Public. Now you can embarrass yourself at home.		8
Dark Cloud 2	Sony	Improves upon the first one in every way imaginable. Building and upgrading weapons to your liking is a blast.		9
Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2	Acclaim	Before turning to Larry Flynt for inspiration, *XXX* was based on the well-mannered Dave Mirra and actually focused on biking.		8
Devil May Cry	Capcom	Did you know *Devil May Cry* was going to be *Resident Evil 4* before it was spun off as its own series? Oh, you did? Never mind, then.		9
Disgaea: Hour of Darkness	Atlus	Aside from being a fantastically deep strategy game, *Disgaea* is also the funniest strategy-RPG we've ever played.		8
Dynasty Warriors 3	Koei	Melee combat set in ancient China. Enemies number in the hundreds along branching story paths.		8
Escape From Monkey Island	LucasArts	LucasArts has a fine tradition of putting out excellent graphical adventure games, and this latest charmer is no exception.		9
ESPN NBA Basketball	Sega	It's the best-looking basketball game this year, and it's marginally the best-playing one, too.		9
ESPN NFL Football	Sega	The new first-person mode is an interesting addition to a solid game of football, but it's still not enough to top *Madden*.		9
ESPN NHL Hockey	Sega	The game formerly known as *NHL 2K1(x)*, where (x) is the last digit of the year we're in. Oh yeah, it's still really good.		9
Fatal Frame 2	Tecmo	One of the downright creepiest ghost stories you'll ever experience. It also doubles as a fun game!		8
Final Fantasy X	Square EA	PS2's first *Final Fantasy* does away with the traditional overworld but introduces full voice acting. Artistically beautiful, as always.		9
Final Fantasy X-2	Square EA	Yuna and company put a fresh set of clothes on *Final Fantasy X*'s gameplay. Hey, ladies!		7
Gran Turismo 3 A-spec	Sony	Core gameplay is unchanged, but the graphics get a complete overhaul, which makes *GT3* the best-playing/looking sim on the market.	10	
Grand Theft Auto: Double Pack	Rockstar Games	Containing both *Grand Theft Auto III* and *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, this is the value of the year. Now go get your mob on.	10	
Guilty Gear XX	Sammy	Tired of waiting for *Street Fighter 4*? This one should more than compensate. Great visuals, great control, and great extras.		8
Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	Electronic Arts	J.K. Rowling's fantasy sport is surprisingly playable in videogame form. We wonder what Sega's *ESPN Quidditch* would be like...		6
High Heat 2004	3DO	The best baseball game available this year. "Simulation" doesn't seem like a strong enough word to describe it.		9
Hitman 2	Eidos	Most of the problems with the original *Hitman* have been fixed, making this one of the more rewarding action games on PS2.		8
Hot Shots Golf 3	Sony	Some golf games need something extra to attract gamers. How about arcade-style control, annoying taunts, and multiplayer modes?		9
Ico	Sony	An underappreciated work of art with challenging puzzles, fantastic lighting, and engrossing character relationships.		9
Jak II	Sony	*Jak II* tries to be everything to all gamers, and it ends up getting a lot of it right, but it's still derivative.		8
K-1 Grand Prix	Konami	The budding sport of K-1 is faithfully represented here, as are the knockout blows to the jaw that sound just as painful as they look.		8
Karaoke Revolution	Konami	Can't carry a tune? Seriously, this game is still for you. Bring on the append discs!		8
Kill.Switch	Namco	Namco's action-shooter uses the concept of cover to create battles with intensity. Not that battles usually aren't intense, mind you...		8
Kingdom Hearts	Square EA	When the amazing, talented artists from Square join forces with the amazing, talented artists from Disney, good things happen.		9
Klonoa 2: Lunatea's Veil	Namco	*Klonoa* became a rare find in PlayStation's later days. The outstanding sequel looks to share the same fate. Grab it if you can.		8
The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King	Electronic Arts	The series concludes with EA's best *LOTR* effort, an improvement on the *Two Towers* that looks fantastic.		9
The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers	Electronic Arts	Anything bearing the valuable *Lord of the Rings* license will sell well. Happily, there's more to this beat-em-up than just the name.		8
Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts	Now this year is the Playmaker system of adjusting plays as they happen, as well as a comprehensive owner mode.		9
The Mark of Kri	Sony	A slick action game with innovative controls. Each button is assigned to a different enemy, allowing for combat with multiple targets.		8
Maximo: Ghosts to Glory	Capcom	It's the spiritual successor to the classic *Ghosts 'n' Goblins*, complete with heart beats and insane difficulty.		8
Maximo vs. Army of Zin	Capcom	Improves upon the original *Maximo* in every conceivable way: better graphics, better camera, and a better pace.		8
MDK 2: Armageddon	Interplay	Much improved over the original Dreamcast incarnation, *MDK 2: Armageddon* is one of the better recent action games.		8
Medal of Honor: Frontline	Electronic Arts	A strong single-player campaign paves the way through the beaches of Normandy and the heart of France. Great audio.		8
Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	Konami	There's a lot in this update: 350 VR missions, 150 alternate missions, five Snake Tales, and one skateboard. Yes, a skateboard.		9
MotoGP 3	Namco	After three attempts, Namco got it right...sort of. The realism is astounding, as long as you ignore the giant Mr. Driller.		8

MORE
tips codes strategies online and more!

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	OWN RATING
NASCAR Thunder 2004	Electronic Arts	It's a lot like last year's version of *Thunder*, only better. Obviously for NASCAR fans.	8
NBA Live 2004	Electronic Arts	Should you upgrade to the latest version of *Live*? As new announcer Marv Albert would say, "YES!"	8
NBA Street Vol. 2	Electronic Arts	Even better than the first, *Vol. 2* takes you through the legendary players and teams of the NBA's storied history. A great deal of fun.	8
NCAA Football 2004	Electronic Arts	EA took the excellent *NCAA 2003*, added some new blocking and pass-defense enhancements, and produced another winner.	9
Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2	Electronic Arts	Strangely, the game's best version is on the least-powerful hardware. Running from cops has never been this fun or consequence free.	9
Need for Speed Underground	Electronic Arts	All the thrills of illegal street racing without having to run from the cops. Unless you steal your copy.	8
NHL 2004	Electronic Arts	It doesn't look as good as its competitors, but then again, you don't need to be pretty to score goals.	8
NHL Hitz Pro	Midway	It's hardly realistic, but it's not supposed to be. It's also the closest we'll ever get to a new *Ice Hockey* or *Blades of Steel*.	8
NFL Street	EA Big	It's formulaic, except more fun.	8
Onimusha 2: Samurai's Destiny	Capcom	The effort put forth in defeating Nobunga in *Onimusha* has gone to waste, as he's risen from the dead to appear in the sequel.	8
Onimusha: Warlords	Capcom	Survival-horror with a taste for feudal Japan, gorgeous artistic design, and a whole lot more action than its *Resident Evil* kin.	8
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	Ubisoft	This is the right way to bring back a classic...if only the camera were more manageable.	8
Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando	Sony	*Going Commando* borrows ingredients from other genres and makes a giant casserole of awesome.	9
Rayman 2: Revolution	Ubisoft	One of the best 3D platformers available, the *Rayman* franchise doesn't get the attention it deserves.	8
Resident Evil Code: Veronica X	Capcom	More of a true sequel than *Resident Evil 2*, *Veronica*'s Dreamcast debut meant many fans missed out. Problem solved!	8
Rez	Sega	A fairly standard shooter dressed as a visual and aural masterpiece. Sadly unappreciated by the vast majority of the gaming world.	8
R-Type Final	Eidos	*R-Type* does its swan song with all the joyful intensity you could ask for.	9
Rygar: The Legendary Adventure	Tecmo	This Greek-mythology-based action game is an update of the arcade and NES classic in name only. Fun combat and great music.	8
Sega Sports Tennis	Sega	Arcade-style tennis perfection when it launched for Dreamcast. It's holding up just as well on *PS2*.	8
Silent Hill 3	Konami	The third chapter of this grisly horror show once again has you running down dark hallways with a flashlight.	8
The Simpsons: Hit & Run	Vivendi Universal	Holy crap! It's a good *Simpsons* game! Gamers will enjoy the fun driving missions, and fans will eat up the references.	8
The Sims	Electronic Arts	A new mode helps you figure out how to keep your Sim from pissing himself. Or, if you're like that, how to make him do it.	9
The Sims: Bustin' Out	Electronic Arts	All the familiar goodness of *The Sims*, but now with branching career paths that will take you forever to finish.	8
Sky Gunner	Atlus	If you can look past the slowdown issue (and it can be a pretty big issue at times), *Sky Gunner* is great shooting fun.	8
Sly Cooper and the Thievius Raccoonus	Sony	A solid platformer with a unique aesthetic and animations. Lacks a little in the challenge department; it's a little on the short side, too.	8
SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs	Sony	Possibly the best reason to own a *PS2 Network Adaptor*. The team-based military tactics work better online than off.	8
SOCOM II	Sony	Everything you loved about the first *SOCOM*, now with less of everything you didn't like so much.	9
Soul Calibur II	Namco	Better than the original, but not as innovative as we would have liked. The single-player game isn't as good as *VF4*: *Evolution*'s.	9
Space Channel 5: Special Edition	Agetec	Shake your groove thing, shake your groove thing, yeah yeah! Includes the original *Space Channel 5* and its sequel.	8
Splinter Cell	Ubisoft	As expected, the *PS2* port of the Xbox original takes a graphical hit. Doesn't mean it's not still a great game, though.	8
SpyHunter	Midway	A re-creation of the classic that manages to avoid tarnishing all the good memories, which can't be said for a lot of classic remakes.	8
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA ditches individual courses in favor of one giant mountain and ends up making the best *SSX* yet.	9
Sub Rebellion	Metro3D	Customizable submarines rule the waters of the future; *Sub Rebellion* is an action game that's short on graphics but very entertaining.	8
Tekken Tag Tournament	Namco	Essentially *Tekken 3* with enhanced graphics and tag teaming. Which isn't bad, considering *Tekken 3* is a great game to begin with.	8
Tenchu: Wrath of Heaven	Activision	*Tenchu* sneaked onto the list without us noticing. We were drunk on sake and telling tales of heroism, so that might be why.	9
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts	Tiger Woods made golf cool (sort of). *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004* makes golf games cool (sort of).	9
TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Everything good about the original is here, with loads of new multiplayer options, including maps, weapons, and game modes, too.	9
Tokyo Xtreme Racer Zero	Crave	Cruise Tokyo's highways in search of less-than-legal street-racing action. Despite some visual issues, it's definitely worth checking out.	8
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Activision	Neversoft dropped the two-minute time limit in career mode and added an array of objectives. Level design is a step up from *THPS3*'s.	8
Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	The depth and versatility of *THUG*'s customizable gameplay make it the best *Hawk* yet.	10
Twisted Metal: Black	Sony	With the franchise safely out of the hands of 989 Studios, *Twisted Metal* makes a welcome return to its former gruesome glory.	9
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	Sega	The greatest 3D fighter ever created, and it's only a measly $20. Mow the lawn twice, and it's yours.	10
Whiteboarding Unleashed	Activision	A surprisingly stellar extreme-sports title that manages to make the *Tony Hawk* formula work on water. Watch out for the gators.	8
War of the Monsters	Sony	King Kong's agent wanted a cool $20 mil. for this fun beat-em-up, but Sony balked and went with the less-recognizable Congar.	8
Wild Arms 3	Sony	A grand adventure with a Wild West theme, endearing characters, great music, and a refreshingly uncomplicated battle system.	8
Winning Eleven 7	Konami	Enough tweaks to warrant a purchase, even if you own the last *Winning Eleven*.	9
Wipeout Fusion	Barn	The Designer's Republic touch may be missing, but the series' oft-imitated, never-surpassed style of racing remains intact.	8
WWE SmackDown!: Here Comes the Pain	THQ	Much better than the previous *SmackDown!*, *HCTP* improves the previously flawed grappling system.	8
Xenosaga	Namco	A massive RPG with an epic story and length. Namco's now in charge of the *Xeno* series, and this is the first of many planned chapters.	8
Zone of the Enders: The 2nd Runner	Konami	Better enemies, better pacing, better music, better stages, and better weapons. What we're trying to say is, *ZOE2* is better than the first.	8

PS2

[BUY!]

R-TYPE FINAL

➡ Shed a tear and pay tribute to this series with your gaming dollars. It's the final installment of *R-Type*, combining classic shooter gameplay with style—and brutal difficulty. It's *R-Type* of game, to be sure. Ha ha ha.

[AVOID!]

TERMINATOR 3: RISE OF THE MACHINES

➡ We can only hope that the legions of Californians who voted for Arnie for governor aren't such rabid fans that they'll purchase this title based on the fact that his face is on the game package.

➡ PC TOP 50   HEAD TO THE PC FOR ACTION AND ADVENTURE!

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAID	OUR RATING
Aliens vs. Predator 2	Sierra	Three completely different first-person shooters combined into one dark and terrifying gaming experience.	9
Armed & Dangerous	LucasArts	Tea-drinking robots and guns that fire sharks. What else could you possibly ask for?	9
Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn	Interplay	The rare occasion when the sequel to a classic goes above and beyond its predecessor. Can't wait for III.	9
Battlefield 1942	Electronic Arts	Multiplayer shooter set in WWII that lets you jump in and out of vehicles (even planes!) while battling dozens of your friends.	9
Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon	Revolution Games	If you like adventure games that offer challenging puzzles and great visuals, then cozy up to *The Sleeping Dragon*.	8
Civilization III	Infogrames	Sid Meier's classic just keeps rolling along, getting bigger and more complex while somehow managing to remain just as addictive.	10
Day of Defeat	Activision	You won't need to upgrade your videocard to play this teamplay-focused WWII shooter. What a refreshing concept.	8
Deus Ex: Invisible War	Eidos	*Invisible War*, much like the first *Deus Ex*, is a game whose better moments far outweigh its lesser ones.	9
Diablo II: Lords of Destruction	Blizzard	The sequel to the ultimate dungeon-crawling clickfest should please anyone who wasted their teens playing the first game.	9
Dungeon Siege	Microsoft	Hack-n-slash doesn't have to be complicated. Sometimes, it can even be in beautiful 3D with no loading time between levels.	9
The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind	Bethesda	The definitive open-ended RPG epic. Sort of like *GTA3*, but with magic, elves, and all that D&D flava.	9
EverQuest	Sony Online	The MMORPG that's so addictive, it makes crack seem like Sanka. Play this game at your own risk.	9
EverQuest: Scars of Velious	Sony Online	The expansion pack to *Everquest* opens up new worlds, new characters, and tigers with boobies (finally!).	9
Fallout Tactics	Interplay	Squad-based tactical strategy game (set in the same universe as the classic *Fallout* RPG) that sets a new standard.	9
Final Fantasy XI	Square Enix	If you possess the patience (and the money for the monthly fee), *FFXI* is a rewarding MMO experience.	8
Freedom Force	Electronic Arts	Clever use of strategy and RPG elements helps make this witty comic-book-superhero-themed game one of the best.	9
Freelancer	Microsoft	It's not as simtastic as some might expect a PC space shooter to be, but that's part of its charm. Random missions keep the fun going.	8
Ghost Recon: Island Thunder	Ubisoft	This top-notch mission pack makes a decent modern-combat simulation into an outstanding one.	8
Giants: Citizen Kabuto	Interplay	A shooter/strategy hybrid full of weird British humor, unique and beautiful 3D graphics, and naked-lady sea monsters.	9
Grand Prix 4	Infogrames	It's a tough choice for Formula One fans. *GP4* and *F1 2002* are both worthy of your hard-earned dollars.	9
Grand Theft Auto III	Rockstar Games	The poster child for all that's wrong in gaming is chock-full of all that's fun in gaming. And you get to import your own MP3s.	10
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	The PC version of the hit game sports a higher resolution, custom MP3 soundtracks, and mouse-look for easier killin'.	10
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	An almost perfect blend of action and stealth, it's a humongous improvement over the first game.	9
IL-2 Sturmovik	Ubisoft	Amazingly realistic WWII flight sim covering a region seldom visited in computer games: the Eastern Front.	9
Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast	LucasArts	Yeah, the lightsaber battles are sweet, but Lando's cameo just about seals the deal. And is his ship fly or what?	9
Knights of the Old Republic	LucasArts	The best thing to happen to the *Star Wars* franchise since *The Empire Strikes Back*. And the best RPG we've played in years.	10
Kohan: Ahriman's Gift	Strategy First	Surprisingly accessible fantasy-themed real-time strategy game that's as much fun in single player as it is against other mages online.	9
Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts	New this year is the Playmaker system of adjusting plays as they happen, as well as a comprehensive owner mode.	9
Max Payne	G.O.D.	Despite some corny writing, this überhip noir videogame feels like a movie, but plays like a great action game.	9
Medal of Honor: Allied Assault	Electronic Arts	Worth it just for the incredibly intense D-Day mission that almost matches the same scene in *Saving Private Ryan*.	9
Medieval: Total War	Activision	The ultimate historical strategy game has everything from political intrigue to sweeping real-time battles.	9
Motocross Madness 2	Microsoft	It's mud-splattering, off-road supercross fun with this free-wheeling dirt-bike simulator from the makers of *ATV Offroad Fury*.	9
NASCAR Racing 2003	Vivendi Universal	It's the final installment of the series, and it's also the best. There's not much new, but everything's been tweaked to near-perfection.	8
Neverwinter Nights	Infogrames	If you're a D&D nerd, then you already know, but buy this one especially for the multiplayer and user-made mods.	9
Neverwinter Nights: Shadows of Undrentide	Atari	This *Neverwinter Nights* expansion has almost enough content to qualify as a new game itself.	8
No One Lives Forever	Vivendi Universal	Austin Powers ain't got nothing on Cate Archer, the hottest digital chick with a gun since that old hag Lara Croft.	9
No One Lives Forever 2	Vivendi Universal	As funny and stylish as the original '60s spy spoof (if that's even possible), and more fun to play, too.	9
Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis	Codemasters	The first in the highly original series of combat sims, this soldier/flight/tank sim went on to win OGWR's 2001 Game of the Year award.	9
Operation Flashpoint: Resistance	Codemasters	Features and content worthy of a brand-new game, this is a benchmark expansion for a classic overlooked game.	9
Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield	Ubisoft	The command interface and character A.I. have been revamped, but it runs slowly on anything but a high-end rig.	8
Rise of Nations	Microsoft	It's not the greatest RTS game we've played, but the nation-building aspect makes *Rise of Nations* especially appealing.	9
Sacrifice	Interplay	Action/strategy hybrid defies the conventions of all the genres it touches, while making for a fantastically original multiplayer experience.	8
Sid Meier's Sim Golf	Electronic Arts	*Sim Golf* will have you laying out golf courses and building resorts like a virtual Robert Trent Jones.	8
Silent Storm	Encore	Old-school turn-based gameplay meets new-school 3D destructibility.	9
The Sims	Electronic Arts	It's impossible to categorize EA's addictive superblockbuster life simulator, just like it's impossible to stop playing it.	9
The Sims: Hot Date	Electronic Arts	Gamers everywhere, rejoice! Finally, a game where you can actually learn a thing or two about interacting with the opposite sex!	9
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts	Tiger Woods made golf cool (sort of). *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004* makes golf games cool (sort of).	8
Tron 2.0	Buena Vista	For our younger readers, we recommend renting the original *Tron*, waiting 20 years, and then playing this game.	8
Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne	Vivendi Universal	Adds a single-player campaign to *Warcraft III* that isn't so moody and serious. There are some new multiplayer units as well.	9
Warlords Battlecry II	Ubisoft	RTS and RPG, two great flavors that go well together—especially when combined with a big, gnarly wizard's staff!	8

[BUY!] SILENT STORM

Yeah, it's from Encore, which typically publishes crap games. Yeah, it's turn based. Yeah, it's another WWII game. But blowing up walls and hurling guys through windows in 3D adds that *je ne sais quoi*.

[AVOID!] DRAKE OF THE 99 DRAGONS

If you play this third-person "adventure," you will be eaten by a very large insect, spit out, and trampled. Science will then reconstruct your mangled corpse and put you on display at a museum, where you will be kept as an example to others.

→ XBOX TOP 50 GAMES TO THE POWER OF X

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	OGR RATING
Armed & Dangerous	LucasArts	Tea-drinking robots and guns that fire sharks. What else could you possibly ask for?	9
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance	Vivendi Universal	A beautiful-looking *Dungeons & Dragons*-based hack-n-slash that can be played cooperatively with another player.	8
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	*Rayman* creator Michel Ancel has done it again: *BG&E* is a spectacular adventure.	9
Burnout 2: Point of Impact	Acclaim	An arcade racer with an emphasis on spectacular crashes, which—now that we think about it—defeats the purpose of competitive racing.	8
Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge	Microsoft	The single-player mode might last you a day, but the online dogfighting lasts for an eternity. Or maybe just a few months.	8
Dead or Alive 3	Tecmo	It's not the deepest of fighters, but it definitely competes for the best-looking prize. Plus, the girls are back in all their bouncy glory.	8
Dead or Alive: Xtreme Beach Volleyball	Tecmo	Pro tip: When playing *DOAXBV*, have your TV remote handy. If Mom bursts in, hit the surf button and flip to the History Channel. She'll be proud.	7
Deus Ex: Invisible War	Eidos	*Invisible War*, much like the first *Deus Ex*, is a game whose better moments far outweigh its lesser ones.	8
The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind	Bethesda	An exhaustive open-ended RPG that essentially allows you to make it up as you go along, with hundreds of people to talk to.	8
ESPN NBA Basketball	Sega	It's the best-looking basketball game this year, and it's marginally the best-playing one, too.	8
ESPN NFL Football	Sega	The new first-person mode is an interesting addition to a solid game of football, but it's still not enough to top *Madden*.	7
ESPN NHL Hockey	Sega	The game formerly known as *NHL2K[x]*, where [x] is the last digit of the year we're in. Oh yeah, it's still really good.	9
Grand Theft Auto: Double Pack	Rockstar Games	Containing both *Grand Theft Auto III* and *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, this is the value of the year. Now go get your mob on.	10
Halo	Microsoft	The definitive reason to own an Xbox. There are plenty of secondary reasons, sure, but no Xbox owner should be without *Halo*.	10
High Heat 2004	3DO	The best baseball game available this year. "Simulation" doesn't seem like a strong enough word to describe it.	9
Jet Set Radio Future	Sega	*Jet Set Radio Future* has substance and an overabundance of style. Sega simplified tagging in favor of a more robust trick system.	8
The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King	Electronic Arts	The series concludes with EA's best *LOTR* effort, an improvement on *The Two Towers* that looks fantastic.	8
Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts	New this year is the Playmaker system of adjusting plays as they happen, as well as a comprehensive owner mode.	9
Max Payne	Rockstar Games	The bullet-time effect is the big draw of this action/shooter. Inspired by Hong Kong action flicks, it's set in a gritty New York City.	8
MechAssault	Microsoft	It's a good single-player game, but it really shines on Xbox Live, where you're pitted against other mech pilots.	9
MotoGP 2	THQ	What we said: "Can only be described as the best motorcycle-racing sim on the planet." What more do you need?	8
NBA Live 2004	Electronic Arts	Should you upgrade to the latest version of *Live*? As new announcer Marv Albert would say, "YES!"	8
NBA Street Vol. 2	Electronic Arts	Even better than the first, *Vol. 2* takes you through the legendary players and teams of the NBA's storied history. A great deal of fun.	9
NCAA Football 2004	Electronic Arts	EA took the excellent *NCAA 2003*, added some new blocking and pass-defense enhancements, and produced another winner.	9
Need for Speed Underground	Electronic Arts	All the thrills of illegal street racing without having to run from the cops. Unless you steal your copy.	8
NFL Street	EA Big	It's like football, except more fun.	8
NHL 2004	Electronic Arts	It doesn't look as good as its competitors, but then again, you don't need to be pretty to score goals.	8
Ninja Gaiden	Tecmo	Itagaki's long-awaited and much-anticipated ode to the ninja is absolutely stunning.	9
Otogi: Myth of Demons	Sega	*Otogi* boasts some of the finest artistic touches you'll find on Xbox. Oh, the slice-and-dice, destroy-everything gameplay is fun, too.	8
Panzer Dragoon Orta	Sega	Aesthetically beautiful and a dream to play. True what Saturn owners were enjoying seven years ago (the original *Panzer Dragoon* is included).	9
Phantom Crash	Phantagram	Xbox certainly isn't lacking in mech titles. The quirky, unique *Phantom Crash* has upgradeable mechs and a story-driven one-player mode.	8
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	Ubisoft	This is the right way to bring back a classic...if only the camera were more manageable.	9
Project Gotham Racing 2	Microsoft	A great racer with the best implementation of online features to date. Plus, *Geometry Wars*!	9
Pure Pinball	Microsoft	This rally racer is one of the best examples of Xbox's power. More arcade than simulation, with enough depth to please both camps.	8
Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Tides of War	Activision	The single-player missions still aren't much to write home about, but at least you can play them with a pal. The online play is gravy.	8
The Simpsons: Hit & Run	Vivendi Universal	Holy crap! It's a good *Simpsons* game! Gamers will enjoy the fun driving missions, and fans will eat up the references.	8
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA ditches individual courses in favor of one giant mountain and ends up making the best SSX yet.	9
Star Wars Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast	LucasArts	As usual, the *Star Wars* universe inspires great aesthetic design to complement Raven Software's solid sense of game design.	8
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	LucasArts	The best thing to happen to the *Star Wars* franchise since *The Empire Strikes Back*, and the best RPG we've played in years.	10
Steel Battalion	Capcom	If you want to play this game, you have to shell out $200 for the massive controller. For those with the cash, it's well worth it.	8
Soul Calibur II	Namco	Better than the original, but not as innovative as we would have liked. The single-player game isn't as good as *VF4: Evolution*.	9
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts	Tiger Woods made golf cool (sort of). *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004* makes golf games cool (sort of).	8
TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Everything good about the (PS2) original is here, with loads of new multiplayer options, including maps, weapons, and game modes.	8
Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3	Ubisoft	Tactical shooting at its almost best. Best played cooperatively over the Net with some friends. Or sworn enemies.	8
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell	Ubisoft	Comparisons to *Metal Gear Solid* help *Splinter Cell* holds its own and even outdoes Konami's behemoth at times.	9
Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	The depth and versatility of THUG's customizable gameplay makes it the best Hawk yet.	10
Top Spin	Microsoft	Microsoft liked *Virtua Tennis* so much, it went and made its own version...and it's better.	9
Unreal Championship	Atari	Mindless deathmatching with great weapon design and entertaining multiplayer modes, including the sportlike bombing run.	9
Wakeboarding Unleashed	Activision	A surprisingly stellar extreme-sports title that manages to make the *Tony Hawk* formula work on water. Watch out for the gators.	9
World Series Baseball 2K3	Sega	*WSB2K3* is the best-looking baseball game and it has a great franchise mode, but it's got A.I. issues that still need to be worked out.	8

XB

[BUY!]
PRINCE OF PERSIA:
THE SANDS OF TIME
→ We're not done with railing on you for passing up great games. *Prince of Persia* is not getting the sales it deserves, but it's definitely one of the best Xbox games out there

[AVOID!]
DRAKE OF THE 99 DRAGONS
→ Avoid Drake—with its mangled camera and horribly broken platforming—like the plague. It is the plague. It will infect you with this disease, rendering you impotent and celibate.

→ GAMECUBE TOP 50 NEW AND IMPROVED!

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	OUR RATING
Animal Crossing	Nintendo	The game that never ends is based largely on routine chores, yard work, and interior decorating. So why is it so much fun to play?	9
Beach Spikers	Sega	Easy to pick up and easy to play, like Virtua Tennis. As with most arcade sports games, it's definitely better as a multiplayer affair.	8
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	Rayman creator Michel Ancel has done it again: BG&E is a spectacular adventure.	9
Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg	Sega	Sonic Team cracked a few eggs and whipped up a great new platformer. Yeah, that was lame. Sorry.	8
Bomberman Generation	Majesco	A surviving member of the old school, Bomberman has earned some kudos in the industry. This time, he sports a cel-shaded look.	8
Burnout 2: Point of Impact	Acclaim	The best-looking—and best-playing—racer on the system. Be prepared to spend many hours in crash mode.	9
Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem	Nintendo	This game, if you let it, will mess with your head. The insanity effects are clever the first time), and the scenery is downright creepy.	8
F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Unfortunately, F-Zero GX doesn't include vomit bags. Or the AX arcade machine. One of those would have been nice.	9
Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles	Nintendo	A true Final Fantasy? It matters not. This action-RPG is fantastic when played with friends.	8
Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	Electronic Arts	J.K. Rowling's fantasy sport is surprisingly playable in videogame form. We wonder what Sega's ESPN Quidditch would be like...	8
High Heat 2004	3DO	The best baseball game available this year: "Simulation" doesn't seem like a strong enough word to describe it.	8
The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	It looks and feels like the best Zelda game ever, but sailing back and forth in the overworld just feels like work.	9
The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King	Electronic Arts	The series concludes with EA's best LOTR effort, an improvement on The Two Towers that looks fantastic.	9
Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts	New this year is the Playmaker system of adjusting plays as they happen, as well as a comprehensive owner mode.	9
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	The only thing missing is Mario hurling his 4-iron into the pond while screaming obscenities. Oh well, next time.	9
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	The Mario Kart legacy remains intact, offering up a highly enjoyable co-op mode and great track design.	8
Mario Party 4	Nintendo	There are few things better in life than three friends, Mario Party, and a healthy flow of alcoholic beverages (if you're legal, of course).	8
Metroid Prime	Nintendo	As if they dissected Super Metroid, added a dimension, and put it back together again with slick graphics. In fact, it's exactly like that.	10
NASCAR Thunder 2003	Electronic Arts	It's apparently the fastest-growing "sport" in America, and Thunder 2003 is packed under the hood, including an in-depth career mode.	8
NBA Courtside	Nintendo	No longer under the Nintendo development umbrella, Left Field's final installment of the Courtside series is a worthy b-ball game.	8
NBA Live 2004	Electronic Arts	Should you upgrade to the latest version of Live? As new announcer Marv Albert would say, "YES!"	9
NBA Street Vol. 2	Electronic Arts	Even better than the first, Vol. 2 takes you through the legendary players and teams of the NBA's storied history. A great deal of fun.	9
NCAA Football 2004	Electronic Arts	EA took the excellent NCAA 2003, added some new blocking and pass-defense enhancements, and produced another winner.	7
Need for Speed Underground	Electronic Arts	All the thrills of illegal street racing without having to run from the cops. Unless you steal your copy.	9
NFL Street	EA Big	It's like football, except more fun.	8
NHL 2004	Electronic Arts	It doesn't look as good as its competitors, but then again, you don't need to be pretty to score goals.	8
NHL Hitz Pro	Midway	It's not realistic, but it's the closest we'll ever get to a new Ice Hockey or Blades of Steel.	8
Pac-Man Vs.	Namco	More than 20 years after the game's release, GMR reviews Pac-Man. It's sort of good, we guess.	6
Phantasy Star Online: Episode I & II	Sega	Unhealthily addictive. The pursuit of rare items helps one ignore the somewhat repetitive battles (and the $9 monthly fee).	8
Pikmin	Nintendo	Mario creator Shigeru Miyamoto got the idea for this quirky strategy game from observing his personal garden. What kind of garden?	8
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	Ubisoft	This is the right way to bring back a classic...if only the camera were more manageable.	8
Resident Evil	Capcom	This remake could almost be described as a new game. But is it really Resident Evil without the laughably bad voice acting?	9
Resident Evil 0	Capcom	This one actually is a brand-new game, with significant changes, such as droppable items and the dirty-sounding partner swapping.	9
SoulCalibur Slam	Namco	An arcade-style soccer game with off-the-wall characters, arenas, and power-ups. And it's still better than Virtua Strikers!	6
The Simpsons: Hit & Run	Vivendi Universal	Holy crap! It's a good Simpsons game! Gamers will enjoy the fun driving missions, and fans will eat up the references.	8
The Sims: Bustin' Out	Electronic Arts	All the familiar goodness of The Sims, but now with branching career paths, two-player co-op, and more.	9
Skies of Arcadia: Legends	Sega	If you missed it on Dreamcast—and many of you did—you've been given a second chance. It's even got new characters.	9
Soul Calibur II	Namco	Better than the original, but not as innovative as we would have liked. The single-player game isn't as good as VF4: Evolution's.	9
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA ditches individual courses in favor of one giant mountain and ends up making the best SSX yet.	9
Star Wars Rogue Squadron II	LucasArts	At times, Rogue Squadron II syncs closely with scenes from the movies. Impressive when you consider it took only nine months to make.	9
Super Mario Sunshine	Nintendo	Maybe not quite as groundbreaking as Super Mario 64, but even when Nintendo "misses," it makes a big splash.	9
Super Monkey Ball	Sega	Monkeys in balls! An exceptional game based on a simple concept; some of the later levels will eat you for lunch.	9
Super Monkey Ball 2	Sega	Even more monkeys in balls running around for your entertainment! The extra game modes add quite a bit to the simple concept.	8
Super Smash Bros. Melee	Nintendo	A Nintendo fanatic's dream, if only for the exhaustive gallery of collectible Nintendorabilia. Plus, you can beat the crap out of Jigglypuff.	9
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts	Tiger Woods made golf cool (sort of). Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004 makes golf games cool (sort of).	8
Ty the Kiwi's Underground	Activision	The depth and versatility of THUG's customizable gameplay make it the best Hawk yet.	10
Ultimate Muscle	Bandai	If the soap-opera antics of the WWE don't go far enough over the top, perhaps the wacky Ultimate Muscle will be more to your liking.	9
Viewtiful Joe	Capcom	A refreshingly original platformer/brawler with an outstanding art style and rock-solid mechanics.	9
Wave Race: Blue Storm	Nintendo	Great wave physics, awesome weather effects, and a deeper control scheme than the original. An underrated gem of a racer.	9
WWE WrestleMania X8	THQ	Ratings have cooled and Stone Cold has made some time with John Law, but that's irrelevant, as wrestling games will always sell.	8

GC

[BUY!]

PRINCE OF PERSIA:
THE SANDS OF TIME

→ If you want to play something of substance, without plumbers or a namby-pamby E rating, get out there and purchase this game.

[AVOID!]

FREESTYLE STREET SOCCER

→ Clumsy controls combine with ethnic stereotypes for a poor, poor attempt at a street-smart, footy title. You want some street in your soccer? Play Winning Eleven 7 while listening to some Mobb Deep.

→ GBA TOP 50 NOW WITH MORE METROID

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	GBA RATING
Advance Wars	Nintendo	Turn-based military strategy that should be part of everyone's GBA library. Once you get sucked in, it's hard to pull yourself away.	6
Advance Wars 2	Nintendo	Wars 2 only adds a single new unit, but it's chock-full of new maps, terrain, and CO powers.	8
Baseball Advance	THQ	There are only four stadiums and no multiplayer, but it's still a great game of baseball.	8
Boktai: The Sun is in Your Hand	Konami	It's gonna be a bright (bright!), briiiiiight sun-shiny day. Well, it had damn well better be.	6
Castlevania: Arts of Sorrow	Konami	Better sound and castle design than Harmony of Dissonance, but much too short. The soul system is ace, though.	8
Castlevania: Circle of the Moon	Konami	Castlevania is meant to be played in two dimensions, and this game shows why. A complex card system governs your special abilities.	9
Castlevania: Harmony of Dissonance	Konami	The second Castlevania is one of the best reasons to own a Game Boy Advance. The colors are brighter and the bosses are bigger.	7
Chu Chu Rocket!	Sega	A highly addictive and highly cute puzzle-action game from Sega that's best played with multiple friends. Mouse mania!	7
Fire Emblem	Nintendo	If Advance Wars and Final Fantasy Tactics fell in love and had a baby, they'd call it Fire Emblem.	6
F-Zero: Maximum Velocity	Nintendo	A new F-Zero based on the classic SNES game, with improved graphics, new tracks, and four-player support.	6
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Square Enix	At long last, we have a new Final Fantasy Tactics—and it's absolutely spectacular. Set aside 60 hours of free time....	9
Final Fight One	Capcom	Another enhanced port of an SNES original. How come mayors of large cities don't go on ass-kicking rampages anymore?	8
Golden Sun	Nintendo	A deep combat engine and brilliant graphics make this one of the better RPGs available on GBA.	8
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Picks up right where the first one left off. The battle system remains basically unchanged, but the puzzles are much more rewarding.	8
Gradius Galaxies	Konami	Konami's classic shooter series translates to the portable very well. Great graphics and plenty of challenge.	7
GT Advance 3	THQ	The GT Advance series has always been technically marvelous, and GTA3 (yeah, we know!) finally has a battery-save function!	7
Guilty Gear X Advance	Sammy	Not surprisingly, the animation and soundtrack take a hit, but it still plays like its beefier versions.	7
Kirby: Nightmare in Dreamland	Nintendo	A remake of the NES classic Kirby's Adventure with updated graphics and multiplayer support.	8
Klonoa: Empire of Dreams	Namco	Straying from the original formula, this Klonoa is more of a puzzle game than a platformer, with great graphics and sound.	7
Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past	Nintendo	Invite three friends over and you've got a bona fide Zelda party. Drink red medicine till you puke and skinny-dip in Lake Hylia!	9
Lufia: The Ruins of Lore	Atlus	Perennially overshadowed by Square's offerings, the Lufia series is just as engaging as Final Fantasy. It's also more challenging.	6
Lunar Legend	Ubisoft	The anime cut-scenes and superb voice acting may be gone, but the great Lunar gameplay and story remain intact.	6
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	Nintendo	It's the only place you'll find the Tanoomba, and that's reason enough to buy this stellar (and hilarious) RPG.	7
Mario Kart: Super Circuit	Nintendo	A balanced blend of Super Mario Kart and Mario Kart 64 that even includes all the tracks from the former.	8
Mega Man Battle Network 2	Capcom	More of an RPG than an platformer, the Battle Network series is a nice change of pace for Mega Man and pals.	7
Mega Man Battle Network 3	Capcom	Battle Network 3 is pretty much more of the same with a few minor additions, but it's already a great series.	8
Mega Man Zero	Capcom	A difficult yet engaging installment of the X side story that is played with Zero, who is equipped with an arm cannon and beamsaber.	7
Metroid Fusion	Nintendo	The follow-up to Super Metroid is eight years late, but the wait was well worth it. An adventure that ends way too quickly.	9
Metroid Zero Mission	Nintendo	True to its roots, with an expanded and finessed story.	8
Ninja Five-0	Konami	A challenging platformer that brings back fond memories of Bionic Commando, complete with throwing stars and katanas.	7
Phantasy Star Collection	THQ	Straightforward classic RPG action that's been overlooked for far too long. Includes Phantasy Star 1, 2, and 3.	7
Pokemon Ruby & Sapphire	Nintendo	Aside from 2-on-2 battles, the first GBA Pokémon combo doesn't really change the original formula.	7
Rayman Advance	Ubisoft	Rayman is just as good in 2D as he is in 3D. It looks great and provides a decent challenge.	7
The Sims: Bustin' Out	Electronic Arts	The chance for a more successful life is in the palm of your hand.	6
Sonic Advance 2	THQ	Sonic Advance 2 is much improved over the first one, and it connects to GameCube's Sonic Adventure games to boot.	8
Sonic Pinball Party	Sega	Not limited to just hedgehogs, Sega's solid pinballer features tables from the classics Nights and Samba de Amigo.	6
Street Fighter Alpha 3	Capcom	Sure, the limiting button configuration prevents SFA3 from being a completely accurate port, but it's great nonetheless.	8
Super Dodgeball Advance	Atlus	You're not going to find that many dodgeball games on the market, so thankfully, this one is worthwhile. Better in multiplayer.	7
Super Ghouls & Ghosts	Capcom	Remember how frustrated you got playing through Ghouls & Ghosts? Get ready to do it all over again.	6
Super Mario Advance, Super Mario 2	Nintendo	Aside from the odd naming system, you can't really complain about a portable version of Super Mario Bros. 2.	8
Super Mario Advance 2, Mario World	Nintendo	There's really not much else that can be said except "portable Super Mario World" and "you should buy it."	9
Super Mario Advance 3, Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	Yoshi is the star of this one, one of the greatest 2D platformers ever put to silicon. There are even a couple of new bonus levels.	8
Super Monkey Ball Jr.	THQ	An excellent port of the game that sold many a GameCube. THQ even included Monkey Bowling and Monkey Fight!	7
Super Puzzle Fighter II	Capcom	Sometimes, you just get bored with Tetris. Puzzle Fighter II is a fantastic port of a fantastic and highly addictive game. Buy it now.	8
Super Street Fighter II	Capcom	The combo of SFA3, Guilty Gear X Advance, and Super Street Fighter II is devastating. And you don't even need any quarters!	8
Tactics Ogre: The Knights of Lodis	Atlus	An incredibly deep strategy-RPG with a branching story line and a rewarding battle system.	8
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3	Activision	It's amazing how Activision managed to cram Tony Hawk into a cartridge while keeping the essence of the console version intact.	8
Virtua Tennis	THQ	A surprisingly faithful rendition of the console versions with good visuals and an engaging world tour mode. The best tennis on GBA.	8
Wario Land 4	Nintendo	The Wario series of platformers has always been excellent, and this one is no exception. Short but incredibly sweet.	8
WarioWare, Inc.	Nintendo	A large collection of microgames fuels WarioWare's madcap mayhem. The freshest game we've seen in a long time.	9

GBA (side tab)

[BUY!]

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2004

→ Forget about those old-fashioned triple-tap "swing meters"—the new control scheme feels way more like real golf. Spring is coming, but with Tiger Woods 2004, you can be playing already!

[AVOID!]

YU YU HAKUSHO: SPIRIT DETECTIVE

→ The best thing about this game? It allows players to exercise their powers of imagination, envisioning the blocklike "fighting" objects as their favorite anime characters.

GAME GEEZER

HE'S OLD! HE'S PISSED!

GOOD WILL MANHUNTING

"Whatcha got in your mouth, Mr. Geezer?"

Ppffftt...why you...! Let me tell you sorry lackwits something: I'm old. And that means I have no use for the three R's—reading, 'riting, and rebellious punks like yourselves. No, I subscribe to the three T's and am damn glad for it.

You want to know what the three T's are? Shut up, this has nothin' to do with Janet Jackson and that Timberlake girl! Besides, I'll do the talking here, so you damnable troglodytes pull up your pants and start listening! The three T's are tapioca, turning the sprinklers on you little cretins playing in my yard, and telling stories that are long and pointless. Why, just the other day I was telling the missus I remember the time when me and the Archduke were picking apples, and he says to me, "Geezer, I think this one has a worm in it." So I says to him, "Archduke, I do believe you're right." And we ate that apple, let me tell you, and then we wished we had some water to wash it down with, clean

water not being invented yet.

"Mr. Geezer, I think we have to go."

You're not goin' anywhere, you sorry slackers! Sit your post-ironic butts down—I'm getting to it! So, you can bet I was surprised when Rockstar Games turned Richard Connell's short story "The Most Dangerous Game" into a PlayStation 2 game. Manhunt, they called it. Oh, they changed the name and prettied it up for a modern audience, but the idea is the same. You play a man who's being hunted for sport.

"Wow. Cool!"

Did you hear a noise? I said shut up and listen! In Manhunt, your character Cash can fight back when he's on the run. Sometimes he'll take a plastic bag and suffocate his enemies with it. Other times he uses a bat the way Wee Willie Keeler did back when bats were actual trees we were too lazy to carve. He can take a shard of glass and jam it into someone's eye. He can find and use bricks, machetes, axes, crowbars, sickles, and meat cleavers.

"Gee, Mr. Geezer, what's with the fuss? It's just a game! Scared of a little violence?"

You can tell your mommies you want a human head for Christmas for all I care, just stop interruptin'! The problem with Manhunt isn't that it's violent, it's that it's only violent. Rockstar got lazy and forgot that whole "good gameplay" thing that got them to the party in the first place.

And what did all that violence add up to for Rockstar? Exactly what Mrs. Geezer gives me every night: zero, nada, nil, a big fat nothin'. Manhunt sold worse than the missus' lingerie at the Geezer Citizens' Bake Sale. And why? Because, frankly, all people

were doing was trying to kill their enemies in the most violent way possible. Once they'd done that, what did they have to look forward to? Bad A.I.? Hand-to-hand fighting that was the videogame equivalent of a schoolyard slap fight?

No, they only had another gory kill to look forward to. Well, that and getting sandwiches aplenty while Cash hid behind a garbage can for 10 minutes, waiting for his enemies to forget about him.

In my day, good, clean violence came along with an actual game—and a fun game to boot. Rockstar ought to know that.

Now git!
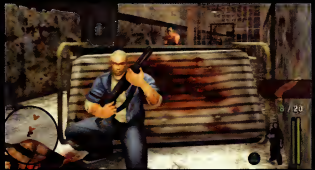
IN MY DAY, VIOLENCE CAME ALONG WITH AN ACTUAL GAME.

ATTENTION YOU HAVE REACHED THE END OF THE MAGAZINE. REMEMBER, BEWARE THE IDES OF MARCH. NOW GIT!

AROUND EVERY CORNER... BEHIND EVERY DOOR... DEEP IN EVERY SHADOW...
TERROR WAITS.

RESIDENT EVIL
OUTBREAK

03-30-04

Take on the role as one of eight survivors of an outbreak caused by a secret biological weapon. Team up with other survivors - up to 4 in online* mode - to create contagiously addictive play scenarios you'll want to try and relive again and again.

*Broadband play only with network adapter